THE APOSTLES OF RAMAKRISHNA



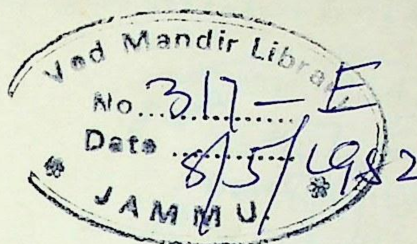
ADVAITA ASHRAMA

When the Great Light disappeared, the lamps that had been kindled by it began to shed lustre in innumerable places. Indeed each disciple of the Master became a centre of wide influence and was instrumental in transforming hundreds of lives. Each one of them was, as the following pages will show, a gigantic spiritual personality—superb in character, unique in achievement and an asset to humanity. When one considers this, one wonders how so many almost superhuman characters could cluster together at one and the same time. Truly Shri Ramakrishna was a great jeweller. So he could collect so many jewels and leave them as a legacy to the world.

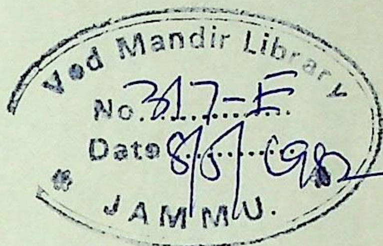
JACKET DESIGN :
Biswaranjan Chakravarty

The central flame represents Shri Ramakrishna and the sixteen earthen lamps below represent the apostles. The background is a combination of facade and altar designs of Shri Ramakrishna temple at Belur.

Price : 9·00



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OF
SHRI RAMAKRISHNA



Compiled and Edited by

SWAMI GAMBHIRANANDA



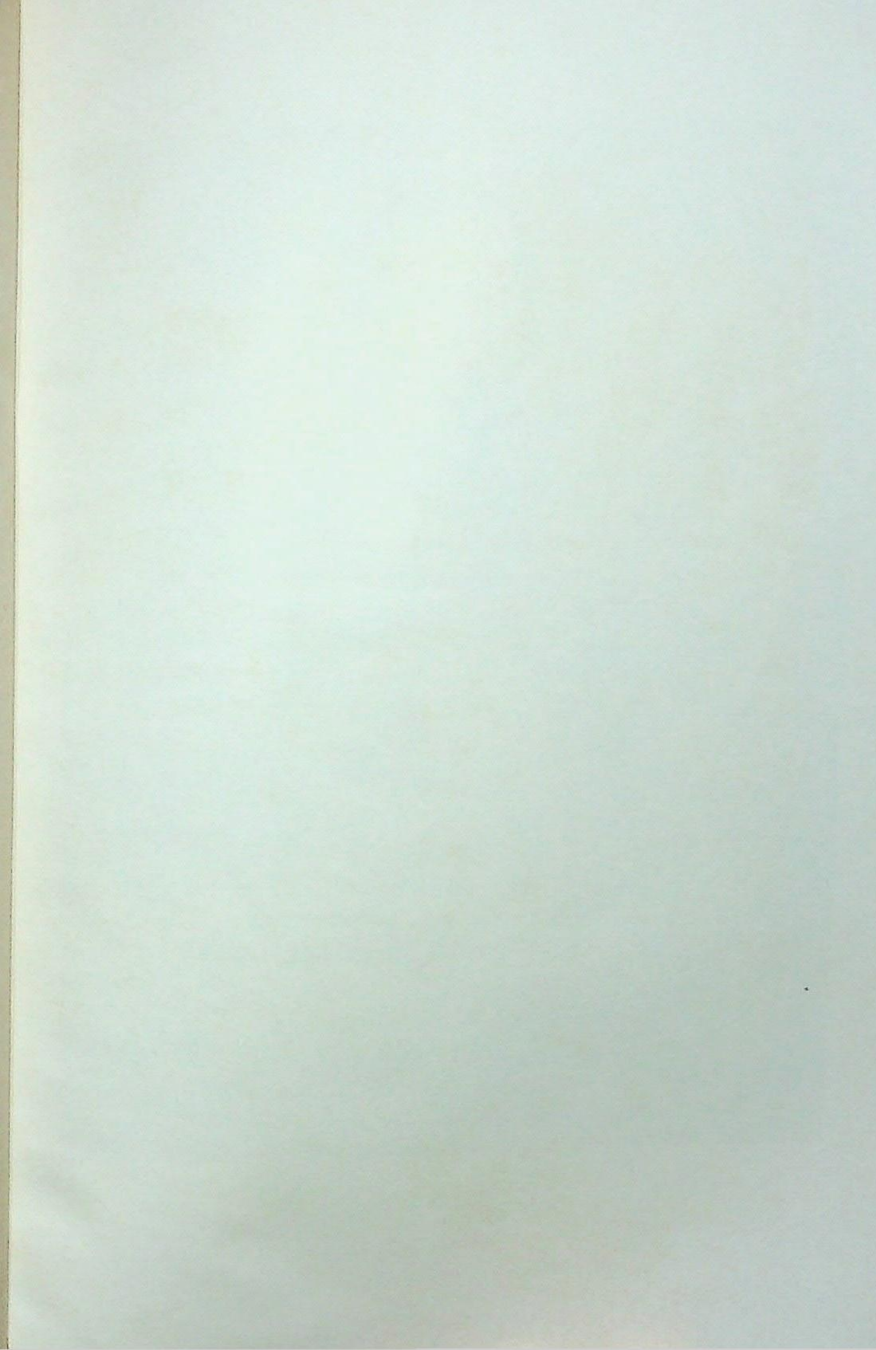
ADVAITA ASHRAMA
5 DEHI ENTALLY ROAD
Calcutta 14

Published by
SWAMI BUDHANANDA
PRESIDENT, ADVAITA ASHRAMA
MAYAVATI, PITHORAGARH, HIMALAYAS

SECOND IMPRESSION—NOVEMBER 1972
3M3C

SET AND PRINTED IN INDIA
In 10 on 12 Baskerville type
BY PRABHAT CHANDRA RAY
AT SRI GOURANGA PRESS PRIVATE LTD.
5 CHINTAMANI DAS LANE, CALCUTTA 9.

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INTRODUCTION

Shri Ramakrishna

The real history of India is the history of the lives of some of her spiritual personalities. It is they who have moulded her life and determined her destiny. On Indian life as a whole, the influence of a Shri Krishna, a Buddha, a Shankaracharya, or a Chaitanya is much more pronounced than the influence of any king or emperor. And it is an interesting phenomenon that at every critical time in the cultural and spiritual life of India there has been born a saint who has saved the country from a fatal catastrophe and shown the nation the right direction.

In the beginning of the last century, India was passing through a great crisis. With the impact of Western civilisation and the spread of English education, the Indians began to lose interest and faith in their own culture. Amongst the English-educated people of India there were very few who had a genuine appreciation of Indian culture, though they were born on Indian soil and had the heritage of India's past.

At that time was born, in an out-of-the-way village of Bengal, one whose life was an unconscious but spontaneous and powerful protest against disregard for the value of Indian religion and culture. It was a strange, divine dispensation that while in Calcutta, the then metropolis of India and the citadel of English education, the Christian missionaries were criticising and abusing Hinduism as idolatrous and a large number of English-

educated Indians even joined or sided directly or indirectly with this proselytising body, Shri Ramakrishna was revitalising the truths of Hinduism by his intense Sâdhanâ (spiritual endeavour) and wonderful realisations at the temple-garden of Dakshineswar, four miles north of the city. And he soon became the powerful instrument of turning the mind of India again to the strength and beauty of its own religious and cultural heritage.

Shri Ramakrishna was born on 18th February 1836 at Kamarpukur, an obscure village in the district of Hooghly. His parents were pious, orthodox Brahmins, and his family surroundings were such that no ray of Western civilisation had any access there. Shri Ramakrishna was a child of nature, and as a matter of fact, throughout his life he remained such, untouched by the least worldliness. The sight of anything beautiful in nature, or the stirring up of emotion by a religious sentiment, would throw his mind into a superconscious state, and in that condition he would remain for a long time oblivious of his surroundings. While his guardians pressed him to receive education at the village school, the boy found great delight in remaining in the open fields, acting religious dramas with his companions or singing devotional music with them. Finding that his life was going to be spoilt in the village atmosphere, his eldest brother took him to Calcutta, where better facilities might be had for education. But the boy was untractable ; he would not undergo the drudgery of an education which was simply a "means of earning bread", though he was athirst for that knowledge which would solve the problem of life and death. His guardian gave up the case as hopeless and let him have his own way.

Shri Ramakrishna was, however, persuaded to take up

the priestly duties in the temple of Kali at Dakshineswar, which was opened in 1855. Here he found congenial work in an atmosphere which was to his liking. But Shri Ramakrishna's was not a mind to be satisfied with the routine duties and the mechanical performance of rituals in the temple. As he was offering worship from day to day before the image of Kali, the thought that oppressed him was, "Is She a living presence, or simply a stone image before which I am bowing down every day?" He was passing through a great mental agony, and this simple childlike thought became almost devouring to him. Day and night he would give vent to his feelings in tears till at last he experienced a living and vivid presence in the image far beyond the possibility of any doubt. After that the Goddess Kali—or the Divine Mother as he would call Her—was to him a greater reality than any material object. He would talk to Her, he would pray to Her, he would hear Her voice—nay, he would feel the very breath of Her nostrils. It is not for us to prove how that was possible, but it was a fact for him.

Shri Ramakrishna was not satisfied with a single form of Sadhana, he undertook almost all the forms of spiritual practice advocated by Hinduism in the different periods of its history. So it is said that he represented in one life the whole religious history of India's past. It was a unique phenomenon. Whereas an aspirant usually undertakes one mode of spiritual practice and considers himself blessed if he can succeed in that, here was one who performed countless forms of Sadhana and in every one attained success in an incredibly short time. Not being content even with that, he practised Islam and realised also the truth of Christianity. Thus he realised

from his own personal experience that all religions are true and that fundamentally there is no difference between them. This is a teaching on which he laid great emphasis.

During the last few years of his life he lived more in the superconscious than in the conscious plane. He remained constantly in tune with the Infinite, and the slightest thing having the remotest association with any religious idea would throw his mind into ecstasy, in which he would be totally oblivious of his surroundings —nay, of his very bodily existence.

Such being the condition of his mind, any worldly thought was impossible for him. He was the embodiment of renunciation. Even if inadvertently his fingers touched any metallic currency, his whole body would recoil, representing as the coin did to his mind the human desire for sense-pleasure. Though in the world, his mind was beyond the reach of the world. His mind was buried in visions, ecstasies and divine communion.

Such a powerful personality could not remain unknown. People began to flock to him for religious inspiration and for the solution of the deeper problems of life. Persons of diverse types and from different walks of life began to come to him. Kristodas Pal—the great national leader, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee—the great Bengali prose writer, Girish Chandra Ghosh—the great actor-dramatist and the father of the Bengali stage, Dr. Mahendra Lal Sarkar—the great physician, Shashadhar Tarkachudamani—the leader of the orthodox Hindu community and an erudite Sanskrit scholar, Keshab Chandra Sen—the great Brahmo leader, to name only a few, were amongst those prominent men of the day who met him and drank in the words of wisdom that fell from



Sri Sarada Devi

his lips. There were innumerable devotees—men and women—whose lives he completely metamorphosed and turned into pure gold. But his chief concern was with a band of disciples, both men and women, whose lives he moulded with particular care for the fulfilment of his future mission.

In the middle of 1885 Shri Ramakrishna fell ill, and for facilities of treatment he had to be removed to Shyampukur in Calcutta in the beginning of October that year. Subsequently, in December, he was taken to a garden-house at Cossipore, where he passed into Mahasamadhi on the 16th August 1886. This sad period, however, served indirectly to strengthen the bond of love among the disciples of the inner circle and gave better opportunity to Shri Ramakrishna to lay the foundation of his future mission surely and adequately. He had to deal with three classes of disciples—the women headed by his own consort Shri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother; the young men led by Narendra Nath who renounced the world afterwards; and the lay disciples like Nag Mahashaya, Girish Chandra Ghosh, and others.

The Holy Mother

Shri Sarada Devi—the nun-wife of Shri Ramakrishna and familiarly known as the Holy Mother—was born on 22nd December 1853 in Jayrambati, a village not very far from Kamarpukur, the birth-place of Shri Ramakrishna. Though Shri Ramakrishna lived constantly on a high spiritual plane, almost oblivious of his surroundings, he consented to his marriage. It was, however, out of the question for him to live a married life; his mind was always on God, and any worldly thought was excruciat-

ing pain to him. Pure as purity itself, Sarada Devi also had no desire for a life of worldliness. She sympathised with the aspirations of her husband and became a help to him in his spiritual pursuits. All that she wanted was to have the privilege of serving him. That favour she was given in abundance. Shri Ramakrishna, for his part, was extremely considerate to her. He gave her the best spiritual training and clearly hinted that his mantle would fall on her and that she would have to fulfil a spiritual mission. He looked upon her as the veritable manifestation of the Divine Mother, and once actually worshipped her as such.

During the last few years of the life of Shri Ramakrishna, Sarada Devi often lived at Dakshineswar and later at Shyampukur and Cossipore. During these years, although she hardly came out of her room or could be seen, her sweetness of character, loving heart and saintliness commanded such respect from the disciples and devotees of Shri Ramakrishna, that they all began to look upon her as their mother.

After Shri Ramakrishna's departure she passed through a period of great suffering and hardship. But as her divine personality unfolded itself more and more, people began to flock to her in larger numbers for spiritual refuge and shelter. She transformed many lives and brought solace and comfort to hundreds of weary souls. It was a rare privilege to come under her spiritual influence, and people thought it a blessed opportunity to serve her in however slight a measure. But she would hardly take any service from anybody; on the contrary she would, just like a mother, look after the comforts of all who came in contact with her. During the later days she lived partly in Calcutta and partly at her

parental home at Jayrambati. In spite of the fact that she belonged to a high spiritual plane, she could and would do all the household work just like an ordinary woman of the village. This simplicity of her life gave opportunities to many to mix with her without any awe or fear. But when one got even a faint glimpse of her real spiritual stature, one was overwhelmed.

In the Ramakrishna Order her place is next, if not equal, to that of the Master himself. Swami Vivekananda started for the West on his historic mission only when she gave her permission and blessings. Her word was final in all the important affairs of the Order, and her slightest wish was more than a sacred injunction to every individual. She was virtually the spiritual guide of the Mission as long as she was in her earthly existence. She passed away on 21st July 1920.

The Disciples

Next to the Holy Mother rank the monastic disciples in spreading the Master's message and giving practical shape to it, with Swami Vivekananda at their head, and the Ramakrishna Math as their centre. When the Great Light disappeared, the lamps that had been kindled by it began to shed lustre in innumerable places. Indeed each monastic disciple of the Master became a centre of wide influence and was instrumental in transforming hundreds of lives. Each one of them was, as the following pages will show, a gigantic spiritual personality—superb in character, unique in achievement, and an asset to humanity. When one considers this, one wonders how so many almost superhuman characters could cluster together at one and the same time. Truly

Shri Ramakrishna was a great jeweller, who could collect so many jewels and leave them as a legacy to the world.

The present volume partially replaces *The Disciples of Ramakrishna* which included the lives of lay disciples also but is now out of print. These "lives", except that of Swami Vivekananda which is included here for the first time, are reproduced from the earlier book after thorough revision. Originally they were written by different persons. This plan had the advantage of presenting the lives from different representative angles of vision, and thus placing before the reader the best picture possible. The same can be said of this volume as well.

The lives of several disciples being closely interlinked, reference has, of necessity, been made in the book earlier to names of persons about whom details come afterwards. But a glance at the contents will obviate any difficulty that may be experienced on this account. As all the lives centred round the single personality of Shri Ramakrishna, and as many of them had the same or similar background, there have been some unavoidable repetition.

At the end of each chapter except the first, we have also added some teachings of the disciples on religion and spirituality.

For the original writings, we are indebted to Swamis Pavitrananda, Kirtidananda, and Vipulananda.

1 November 1966 — Editor

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

Early Days

Swami Vivekananda, or Narendranath Datta, or simply Narendra or Naren as he was known during his pre-monastic days, was born to Vishwanath Datta and Bhuvaneshwari Devi on Monday, 12th January 1863, at Calcutta. The Datta family was rich, respectable, and renowned for charity, learning, and a strong spirit of independence. Narendranath's grandfather, Durgacharan Datta, was well-versed in Persian and Sanskrit and was skilled in law. But after the birth of his son Vishwanath, he renounced the world and became a monk. He was then only twenty-five. Vishwanath Datta was an attorney-at-law in the High Court of Calcutta. He was proficient in English and Persian, and took great delight in reciting to his family the poems of the Persian poet Hafiz. He also enjoyed the study of the Bible which he thought contained the highest wisdom. Though charitable sometimes to an extravagant degree, and sympathetic towards the poor and those who suffered, he was an agnostic in religious matters due to the influence of Western culture which he had imbibed. Bhuvaneshwari Devi was an accomplished woman with a regal bearing. She was deeply religious, and so she sowed and nurtured the seeds of religion in the tender heart of Narendranath. Endowed with a keen memory, she remembered a good portion of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, which she taught her son when he was still very young.

Naughty and restless though Narendranth was by nature, and given to much fun and frolic, he was greatly attracted towards spiritual life even in childhood. The stories of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata,* which his mother told him left on him an indelible impression. Play delighted Narendranath, and one of his pastimes as a child was to worship and meditate on the image of Rama, Sita, or Shiva. Every night, before he fell asleep, there appeared to him between his eyes a wonderful spot of light of changing hues. That light would gradually expand until it burst and bathed his whole being in a white radiance. He had full faith in Hindu mythology. Once he went to hear an exposition of the *Ramayana* in the course of which he heard the pundit describe the great devotion of Hanuman. At the end of the exposition, he approached the pundit and said he would like to know the whereabouts of Hanuman. The pundit said that he might be in some plantain grove. So Narendranath waited at a plantain grove till late at night expecting to meet Hanuman, and his people could find him only after a great search.

Narendranath had his first experience of spiritual trance at the age of fifteen at the sight of a large beehive in a cleft in the hills of Vindhya range. At that time he was travelling with his mother to Raipur (Madhya Pradesh), where his father was then temporarily working.

Morning shows the day, and the early years of Narendranath were full of events that held promise of a great spiritual personality as well as of great powers of leadership. Once, when he was returning with his friends from a fair, carrying some dolls which he had purchased, he heard shouts from behind from people

scared by some imminent danger. Looking back, he found that one of his companions was on the point of being crushed by a hackney carriage. Instantly, putting the dolls under one arm, he rushed to his companion and dragged him out of danger. The passers-by were astonished at the bravery and presence of mind of Narendranath. Another time, young Narendranath was trying with some of his friends to put up a trapeze, but the wooden poles were too heavy for the little boys. A European sailor who was passing by went to their help. He pressed down the legs of the frame with his feet, while the boys pulled at the rope to raise the other end. Suddenly, the rope snapped and the legs jumped up. The sailor was injured and became unconscious. Most of the boys fled in consternation, but Narendranath and a few others took care of the sailor, nursed him to recovery, and raised a subscription for him.

Even in his early boyhood, Narendranath demanded intellectually convincing arguments for every proposition. He often used to swing on the branches of a *champaka* tree in a neighbour's compound. This irritated the owner, an old man, and he warned Narendranath and his companions that the tree was haunted by a bad ghost who would some day break their necks. This frightened the other boys ; but Narendranath argued that if the old man were right, their necks would have been broken long ago. And he continued to swing on the branches of the tree as before.

Vishwanath's clients belonged to all sections of the Calcutta public—Hindus, Mussulmans, Christians, and others. And, as social custom required, to enable them

all to smoke he provided different pipes attached to bowls filled with water. Narendranath's curiosity was aroused by this strange custom. Why could not all use the same pipe ? On inquiry he learnt that unless this custom was followed, one's caste would be lost, so he proceeded to check this fact. One day, when nobody was there in his father's office, Narendranath entered the room and took a puff at each of the pipes in turn. Suddenly, his father entered the room and asked the boy what he was doing. Nothing daunted, the intrepid boy answered that he was just testing how one's caste was actually lost. The amused father left with the simple remark, "Wicked boy that you are !"

Bhuvaneshwari Devi taught young Narendranath the Bengali alphabet and his first English words. At the age of seven, the boy started his education proper under a private tutor. Being exceptionally intelligent, he learnt by heart in a short time a considerable portion of the Sanskrit grammar, *Mugdhabodha,* the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata.* In 1871, at the age of eight, he joined the ninth class at Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar's Metropolitan Institution. In 1879 he entered the Presidency College, after passing the Entrance Examination. A year later he joined the college that is now known as the Scottish Church College.

Narendranath was gifted with a multiplicity of talents and he cultivated them all. His leonine beauty was matched by his courage ; he had the build of an athlete, a delightful voice, and a brilliant intellect. His interests ranged from fencing, wrestling, rowing, games, physical exercise, cooking, and organising dramas to instrumental and vocal music, love of philosophic discussion, and criticism. In all these he was an un-

disputed leader. These and other traits in his character soon attracted the notice of his teachers and fellow students. The principal of his college, professor Hastie, once remarked: "Narendra is a real genius. I have travelled far and wide, but have not yet come across a lad of his talents and possibilities even among the philosophical students in the German universities. He is bound to make his mark in life."

At college Narendranath began to interest himself more seriously in studies. Apart from the usual college curriculum, he avidly studied western logic, the abstruse philosophy of Herbert Spencer, the systems of Kant and Schopenhauer, the mystical and analytical speculations of the Aristotelian school, the positivist philosophy of Comte, and John Stuart Mill's *Three Essays on Religion*. He also mastered the ancient and modern history of Europe and the English poets like Shelley and Wordsworth. He even took a course in physiology with a view to understanding the functioning of the nervous system, the brain, and the spinal cord.

But this contact with western thought, which lays particular emphasis on the supremacy of reason, brought about a severe conflict in Narendranath. His inborn tendency towards spirituality and his respect for the ancient traditions and beliefs of his religion which he had imbibed from his mother, on the one side, and his argumentative nature coupled with his sharp intellect which hated superstition and questioned simple faith on the other, were now at war with each other. Under a deep spiritual urge, he was then found observing hard ascetic practices, staying in his grandmother's house, away from his parents and other relatives, following a strict vegetarian diet, sleeping on

the bare ground or on an ordinary quilt, in accordance with the strict rules of *brahmacharya*. From youth, two visions of life had presented themselves before him. In one, he found himself among the great ones of the earth, possessing riches, power, honour, and glory, and he felt himself capable of attaining all these. In the other, he saw himself renouncing all worldly things, dressed in a simple loin-cloth, living on alms, sleeping under a tree, and then he felt that he had the capacity to live thus like the Rishis of ancient India. It was, however, the second vision that prevailed in the end, and he used to sleep with the conviction that by renunciation alone could man attain the highest bliss. He also used to meditate for long hours before going to sleep; and from boyhood he had a passion for purity, which his mother made him observe as a matter of honour, and in loyalty to herself and the family tradition. He was a born idealist and seeker of truth; so he could hardly be satisfied with worldly enjoyment, though he was a jubilant lover of life.

But now his contact with western philosophy and science unsettled his mind, and he was filled with grave doubts about the existence of God. One of the chief questions that he could not answer was: How to reconcile the presence of evil in Nature with the goodness of an omnipresent Creator? Hume's scepticism and Herbert Spencer's doctrine of the Unknowable made him a settled agnostic. After wearing out his first emotional freshness and naivete, he felt a dryness of heart and an incapacity for his accustomed prayers and devotions. His real problem was: If God really exists, it must be possible for one to see Him. He felt the need of a helping hand to save, to uplift, to protect,

and to transform his impotence into strength and glory.

In this predicament he tried to find comfort in the Brahmo Samaj, a popular socio-religious movement of the time. This sect discarded Hindu conventions, opposed orthodox rituals and image worship, and taught people to worship and adore only 'the eternal, the unsearchable, the immutable Being, who is the author and preserver of the universe'. This new faith appealed to Narendranath. He was also impressed by its insistence on the supremacy of reason, and its programmes for social reform and mass education. Though for a time the congregational prayers and devotional songs of the Samaj attracted him, and he took an active part in them, he soon found that they did not give him that spiritual satisfaction for which he was thirsting.

In his eagerness for spiritual illumination he went to Devendranath Tagore, the leader of the Brahmo Samaj, and asked him: "Sir, have you seen God ?" The old man was embarrassed by the question, and replied, "My boy, you have the eyes of a Yogi. You should practise meditation." The youth was disappointed, but he received no better answer from the leaders of other religious sects whom he approached with the same question.

At this critical juncture he remembered the words of his professor, William Hastie, who, while speaking of trances in the course of his lecture on Wordsworth's *Excursion,* had said, "Such an experience is the result of purity of mind and concentration on some particular object, and is rare indeed, particularly in these days. I have seen only one person who has experienced that blessed state of mind, and he is Ramakrishna Paramahamsa of Dakshineshwar. You can understand if you

go there and see for yourself." Ramachandra Datta, a relative of Narendranath's, seeing his yearning for religion, also advised him: "If you really want to cultivate spirituality, then visit Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar, instead of knocking about here and there." Narendranath had earlier once met Shri Ramakrishna in the house of Surendranath Mitra, a disciple who invited the Master occasionally to his house for the benefit of himself and other devotees. On one occasion Narendranath had been requested to be present to sing devotional songs. So now, in his trouble, the young seeker decided to have yet one more try to solve his problem.

At Shri Ramakrishna's Feet

Shri Ramakrishna represented the very heart of India, with all her spiritual traditions, asceticism, and realisations—the India of the Vedas, the Puranas, and the Gita. From childhood, he had remarkable insight into spiritual truths. Having been vouchsafed the highest spiritual realisation promised by Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity, he was convinced that the same truth was expressed by all the religions. Thereafter he wanted to share the fruits of his realisation with worthy aspirants, and through them, with the whole world. He was eagerly expecting the arrival of his disciples, and at the very first meeting with Narendranath at Dakshineswar in November 1881, he recognised in him the worthiest of them all.

Shri Ramakrishna, describing the meeting, said later on: "He seemed careless about his body and dress, and unlike other people, unmindful of the external world.

His eyes bespoke an introspective mind. . . . I was surprised to find such a spiritual soul coming from the material atmosphere of Calcutta. . . . The friends with whom he had come appeared to be ordinary young men with the usual tendencies towards enjoyment. He sang a few Bengali songs at my request." To continue the story in the words of Narendranath himself: "Well, I sang the song ; . . . he (Shri Ramakrishna) suddenly rose and led me to the northern veranda. . . . We were alone. I thought he would give me some private instructions. But to my utter surprise, he began to shed profuse tears of joy as he held my hand, and addressing me most tenderly as one long familiar to him, said: 'Ah, you have come so late. How could you be so unkind as to keep me waiting so long! My ears are wellnigh burnt in listening to the profane talks of worldly people. Oh, how I am yearning to unburden my mind to one who can appreciate my innermost experiences !' He continued sobbing, and with folded hands, 'Lord, I know you are that ancient sage Nara, the incarnation of Narayana, born on earth to remove the miseries of mankind', and so on. I was altogether taken aback by his conduct. . . . I thought: 'He must be stark mad. Why, I am but the son of Vishwanath Datta, and yet he dares to address me thus !' But I kept quiet allowing him to go on. Presently, he went back to his room and bringing some sweets, sugar-candy, and butter, began to feed me with his own hands." In vain did Narendranath protest. Before returning to his room, Shri Ramakrishna extracted a promise from him that he would come again alone at an early date.

As he sat and watched him, Narendranath did not find anything wrong or strange in Shri Ramakrishna's

words or behaviour with others. Rather, there was marked consistency between his words and his life, and he appeared to be a man of genuine renunciation. Approaching him, Narendranath asked him the question which he had asked others often before: "Sir, have you seen God?" "Yes," answered Shri Ramakrishna, "I see Him just as I see you here, only I see Him in a much intenser sense. God can be realised ; one can see and talk to Him as I am doing with you. But who cares to do so ? People shed torrents of tears for their wife and children, for wealth and property, but who does so for the sake of God ? If one weeps sincerely for Him, He surely manifests Himself."

This startling reply impressed Narendranath at once. For the first time he had found a man who could say that he had seen God, and recognised that religion was a reality to be felt. As he listened, he could not but believe that Shri Ramakrishna spoke from the depths of his own realisations. But what about his strange conduct with himself a few minutes before ? He concluded he must be a monomaniac, but he could not help admiring his spirit of renunciation. He returned to Calcutta bewildered, but with a feeling of inner peace and blessedness.

The second time Narendranath went to Dakshineswar, a month later, Shri Ramakrishna was alone, sitting on his bedstead. As soon as he saw Narendranath, he received him cordially and asked him to sit near himself on the bed. In a moment, overcome with emotion, the Master drew closer to him. Muttering something to himself, and with eyes fixed on the young aspirant, he touched him with his right foot. The magic touch produced a strange experience in Narendranath. With

his eyes open, he saw the walls and everything in the room, nay, the whole universe and himself within it, whirling and vanishing into an all-encompassing void. He was frightened as he thought he might be on the verge of death, and cried out: "What are you doing to me? I have my parents at home." Shri Ramakrishna laughed aloud at this, and stroking Narendranath's chest, said: "All right, let us leave it there for the present. Everything will come in time." Surprisingly, as soon as he uttered these words, Narendranath became his old self again. Shri Ramakrishna, too, was quite normal in his behaviour towards him after the incident, and treated him kindly and with great affection.

Drawn by this kindness and affection, and even more, by the need to fathom the mystery, Narendranath went to Dakshineswar for a third time, probably a week later. He was determined not to allow the previous experience to repeat itself, and was fully on his guard. But with all his critical faculties alert, he fared no better. Shri Ramakrishna took him to the adjacent garden belonging to Jadunath Mallik. After a stroll, they sat down in the parlour. Soon, Shri Ramakrishna fell into a spiritual trance and touched Narendranath. Despite his precautions, Narendranath was totally overwhelmed and he lost all outward consciousness. When he regained consciousness, he found Shri Ramakrishna stroking his chest.

Referring to this incident, Shri Ramakrishna said later on: "I put several questions to him while he was in that state. I asked him about his antecedents, and where he lived, his mission in this world, and the duration of his mortal life. He gave fitting answers after diving deep into himself. The answers only

confirmed what I had seen and inferred about him. These things shall remain a secret, but I came to know that he was a sage who had attained perfection, a past master in meditation, and the day he knows his real nature, he will give up the body by an act of will, through Yoga."

Whatever it was, Narendranath was completely puzzled. He saw the holiness, purity, and extraordinary powers of the person, and he admired them. Perhaps this was the person for whom he was searching. Who else could help him in his intellectual and spiritual struggles? But should he accept him straightaway as his Guru? The wounded pride of his intellect, which had received such an unpleasant rebuff on two occasions, would not allow him to do so. He would test him through and through before he wholly submitted himself to him and accepted him as his guide for life.

Of all the disciples of Shri Ramakrishna, Narendranath alone doubted the Master and criticised any of his teachings that appeared irrational. He was a staunch seeker of truth, and so he detested any form of sentimental piety. During his early contacts, he was severely critical of what Shri Ramakrishna said about his divine visions and quoted as the words of the Mother. He used to ask him bluntly: "How do you know that your realisations are not the creation of your sick brain, mere hallucinations?" And in support of his argument he would cite the latest conclusions of western psychology.

Firmly poised as he was in the knowledge of the highest truth, Shri Ramakrishna, however, did not upset the intellectual outbursts of Narendranath. He rose

equal to the occasion. He never asked Narendranath to abandon his reason. On the other hand, he enjoyed his criticisms, and even encouraged them. He told him: "Test me as the money changers test their coins. You must not accept me until you have tested me thoroughly." He led the young disciple through a path suited to his temperament and when all other methods failed to convince him, he granted him the necessary insight which set all his doubts at rest.

Narendranath was bitterly against the doctrine of Advaita Vedanta which Shri Ramakrishna was eager to explain to him. The Advaita idea of the identity of the individual soul and the Supreme Self appeared to him as bizarre and blasphemous. Shri Ramakrishna tried his best to bring home to the disciple the truth of Advaita by reason and argument, but without success. One day after a trying discussion, he found Narendranath speaking about the doctrine disparagingly to a friend and in a light vein. Shri Ramakrishna, in a semi-conscious mood, approached him and just touched him, and immediately a wonderful change came over Narendranath. He was filled with the consciousness that everything around him was God. The impression persisted even when he reached home, at the end of the day. He did not relish his food. He ate too much or too little, to the consternation of his mother. He felt that the food, the materials, the server and he himself were all God. In the street, he did not feel like moving out of the way of the swiftly moving cabs, thinking they were God Himself. In the public park, he struck his head against the railings to see if they were real. This feeling lasted for many days. Henceforth he could not deny the truth of Advaita.

Narendranath's days passed in study and meditation, with frequent visits to Dakshineswar. Under the guidance and protecting care of the Master, he underwent a rigorous course of spiritual discipline and had various spiritual experiences. He was more and more drawn to the ideal of a monastic life. Fortunately for him, all proposals of marriage fell through on one account or another.

In 1884, Vishwanath Datta suddenly passed away, plunging the whole family into grief and poverty. He was the only earning member of the family, and being of a prodigal nature, he spent lavishly and left the family in debt. At the time Narendranath was studying for the B.A., and had just finished the examination. As the eldest surviving son, he now had to shoulder the entire responsibility of the family. Starving and barefoot, he went from office to office in the scorching sun in search of a job. Everywhere the door was slammed in his face. Friends turned into enemies in an instant. Creditors began knocking at the door. Temptations came. Two rich women made proposals to him to end his poverty, and he turned them down with scorn. Often he went without food so that the others at home might have a better share. He was face to face with realities, and the world appeared to him to be the creation of a devil.

Nevertheless, the protégé of Shri Ramakrishna did not lose his faith in God and divine mercy. Every morning, taking His name he got up and went in search of a job. One day his devout mother overheard him and said bitterly: "Hush, you fool, you have been crying yourself hoarse for God from your childhood. What has He done for you?" Narendranath was stung to

the quick, and began doubting the existence of God. And he did not hide the fact because it was against his nature to do anything in secret. He now proceeded to declare to everybody that God was a myth, or even if He existed, it was useless to call on Him. Friends and foes alike began to exaggerate this, and the report gained currency that he had become an atheist, and had relaxed his moral scruples.

A garbled report of Narendranath's state of mind and activities reached Shri Ramakrishna also. Narendranath was piqued at the thought that Shri Ramakrishna might believe it. He said he did not care if the opinions of people rested on unfounded rumours. But Shri Ramakrishna was quite unperturbed and scolded those who had brought him the report. He had been assured, he said, by the Divine Mother Herself about Narendranath's character.

These atheistic views were just passing ripples on the surface of Narendranath's mind, forced by external circumstances. Deep down in his heart he felt that life would be meaningless if these views were correct. God must exist, and there must be some means of realising Him. He had not forgotten the divine experiences which he had had from his boyhood, and especially after his contact with Shri Ramakrishna.

One evening, after a whole day's fast and exposure to rain, Narendranath was returning home with tired limbs and a jaded mind. Overpowered with exhaustion, he sat down on the outer plinth of a roadside house in a dazed condition. Various thoughts crowded into his mind. He was too weak to drive them off and concentrate on any particular thing. Suddenly he felt that, by some divine power, the coverings of his soul were being

removed one after another. His doubts regarding the coexistence of divine justice and mercy and the presence of misery in the creation of a benign providence were automatically solved. He felt completely refreshed and full of mental peace. He decided to become a monk, renouncing the world. He even fixed a date for it. Shri Ramakrishna came to Calcutta that day. Narendranath went to have his blessings, and accompanied the Master to Dakshineswar. There, in a state of spiritual trance, Shri Ramakrishna began to sing a touching song which brought tears to the eyes of both. The meaning of the song was very clear, for it revealed that the Master had known the disciple's decision even without being told of it. But Shri Ramakrishna persuaded Narendranath to stay in the world as long as he himself lived.

The condition of the family did not improve much. Narendranath could earn a little by working in an attorney's office and translating some books; but he had to carry on a hand to mouth existence. He worked for some time in Vidyasagar's school as a teacher but without much financial improvement. One day it struck him: Why not ask Shri Ramakrishna to pray to God for my sake and thus remove my pecuniary wants? It was believed that God listened to Shri Ramakrishna's prayers. So Narendranath went to Shri Ramakrishna and told him his intention. Shri Ramakrishna said in reply: "Why don't you go and ask Her yourself? All your sufferings are due to your disregard of the divine Mother." Narendranath said: "But I do not know the Mother, you please speak to Her on my behalf. You must." Shri Ramakrishna replied: "My dear boy, I have done so again and again. But as you do not accept

Her, She does not grant my prayer. Go to the Kali temple tonight, and ask Her any boon you like. It will be granted."

It was a Tuesday, an auspicious day for the worship of the divine Mother. Narendranath went at the appointed hour. As he approached the image, he found it living and conscious. He was caught in a surging wave of devotion and love. He forgot to ask the boon for which he had gone there. Instead, he prayed for discrimination, renunciation, knowledge, devotion, and an uninterrupted vision of Her. He felt great peace within when he returned to the Master's room and told him what had happened. Advised by Shri Ramakrishna, he went a second time, but again the same thing happened. The third time, he was overcome with a sense of shame that he could have gone to Her for such a trifle. So he said: "Mother, I want nothing but knowledge and devotion." However, he could not forget the distressing poverty of his family. So he entreated Shri Ramakrishna to help him out of the predicament. At first the Master declined, saying that it was against his nature to pray for anyone's material advancement. But when Narendranath became insistent, he finally gave him an assurance that his people would not lack the bare necessities of life. After this incident, all Narendranath's opposition to Kali the Mother and to image worship vanished.

Thus, with infinite patience, Shri Ramakrishna calmed the rebellious spirit of Narendranath and led him from doubt to certainty and from anguish of mind to spiritual bliss. More than Shri Ramakrishna's spiritual guidance and support, it was his love for him that bound Narendranath to him for ever. Narendranath, too, in

turn reciprocated in full measure the love and trust of the Master.

An incident which had some bearing on the future work of Narendranath may be mentioned here. Once, Shri Ramakrishna was expatiating on the triple precept of the Vaishnavas, namely, relish for the name of God, compassion for all creatures, and service to the Lord's devotees. When he came to compassion for all creatures, he said in a semi-conscious state, as if speaking to himself: "Thou fool! An insignificant worm crawling on earth, who art thou to show compassion? No, it is not compassion for others, but service to man, seeing in him the veritable manifestation of God." Narendranath who was near by, drew from these simple words, which went unnoticed by others present there, a world of meaning, and vowed to proclaim to the whole world the grand truth which he had discovered in them. It was then that he conceived his philosophy of practical Vedanta.

In the middle of 1885, Shri Ramakrishna developed cancer in the throat. For better treatment he was taken to a rented garden house at Cossipore, a northern suburb of Calcutta. The young disciples, under the leadership of Narendranath, took charge of nursing the Master. They gave up all thought of their studies for the time being, though that displeased their parents, and whole-heartedly devoted themselves to nursing the Master. In between, when they found time, they would gather to spend some time in meditation, holy study, divine songs, and scriptural discussion. Narendranath was a constant source of inspiration. They lived in a delightful atmosphere, and time passed unnoticed. Attracted by the pure and selfless love of Shri Ramakrishna, and the magnetic personality and fraternal affection of the leader, these

young men[1] were more closely knit together than any family. Though their number did not exceed twelve at that time, each one was by his consecration to the service of the Guru, a tower of strength.

One day, Narendranath heard the other disciples talking about the infectious nature of the disease, as the doctor told them. He saw at his feet the cup of gruel which had been partly taken by the Master and which would have contained the supposed germs of the fatal disease. He took it up and drank from it before them all. Henceforth there was no apprehension on the part of the disciples.

[1] They were Narendranath, Rakhal, Baburam, Niranjan, Yogin, Latu, Tarak, Gopal Senior, Kali, Shashi, Sharat, and Gopal Junior. Sarada, on account of his father's persecution, used to stay occasionally for a day or two. Hari and Gangadhar visited at intervals, but practised *tapasya* at home. The monastic disciples assumed the following names after their ordination later at the Baranagore Math.

Rakhal	... ...	Brahmananda
Niranjan	... ...	Niranjanananda
Latu	... ...	Adbhutananda
Gopal Senior	... ...	Advaitananda
Shashi	... ...	Ramakrishnananda
Sarada	... ...	Trigunatitananda
Gangadhar	... ...	Akhandananda
Baburam	... ...	Premananda
Yogin	... ...	Yogananda
Tarak	... ...	Shivananda
Kali	... ...	Abhedananda
Sharat	... ...	Saradananda
Hari	... ...	Turiyananda
*Hariprasanna	... ...	Vijnanananda

* Though Hariprasanna joined the brotherhood later, we include him in the list for convenience.

Narendranath did not take any particular name at that time. He used to call himself variously, as Vividishananda, Sachchidananda, etc., in order to conceal his identity. So, we refer to him only as Narendranath till he assumed the now famous name of Vivekananda on the eve of his departure for the West in 1893 at the request of the Maharaja of Khetri. The other disciples are referred to by their monastic appellations.

Shri Ramakrishna's illness showed no signs of abatement in spite of the best treatment. As the Master's end neared, Narendranath's thirst for God-realisation increased. One day he entreated the Master for an experience of *nirvikalpa samadhi*, the highest realisation of Advaita Vedanta. He spoke to the Master in this strain: "I want to remain immersed in *samadhi* for three or four days, continuously, breaking it only for a little food." But the Master reprimanded him: "Shame on you! You are seeking such an insignificant thing. There is a state higher than that even. Is it not you who sing, 'Thou art all that exists?' I thought you would be, like a banyan, sheltering thousands from the scorching misery of the world. But now I see you seek your own liberation." A few days later, however, Shri Ramakrishna blessed him with the experience of Nirvikalpa Samadhi. When the beloved disciple came back from that state, the Master said: "Now then, the Mother has shown you everything. Just as a treasure is locked in a box, so will this realisation be hidden from you and the key shall remain with me. You have work to do. When you have finished it, the treasure will be unlocked again, and you will know everything then just as you do now."

One day Shri Ramakrishna distributed *gerua* clothes to the young disciples who were serving him, to signify that they were to become monks and the future apostles of the Ramakrishna Order. He then put them through a ceremony, and sent them out to beg their food. He later told Narendranath: "I leave them all to your care. See that they practise spiritual exercises even after my passing away and that they do not return home."

Three or four days before the end, the Master called

Narendranath to his side, and looking steadfastly on him entered into deep meditation. Narendranath felt a subtle force, resembling an electric shock, passing through his body, and he lost outward consciousness. When he returned to the normal state, Shri Ramakrishna told him, weeping: "O Naren, today I have given you my all and have become a fakir, a penniless beggar. By the force of the power transmitted by me, great things will be done by you ; only after that will you go to whence you came."

At Cossipore also, as earlier at Dakshineswar, Shri Ramakrishna impressed on the other disciples the high plane of spirituality to which Narendranath belonged, and the mission he was born to fulfil. He often talked with Narendranath privately about the order of monks he was to organise, with the brother disciples as the nucleus. Narendranath was thus chosen and trained as the future leader of a spiritual regeneration.

Having finished his immediate task and being assured of a glorious future for the new movement, Shri Ramakrishna passed away on 16th August 1886.

The Baranagore Days

After the death of the Master some of the young disciples returned home, under pressure from their guardians, and resumed their studies. Others went on pilgrimage. Three of them, however, stayed on at the Cossipore house until the expiry of its lease. When they were wondering what to do after that, Surendranath Mitra, one of the lay disciples of Shri Ramakrishna offered to contribute towards the maintenance of a monastery where the young disciples of the Master

could stay and continue their spiritual and devotional exercises, and where the householder disciples might now and then go for peace and solace. Accordingly, an old dilapidated house was rented at Baranagore, and two of the monastic disciples went to live there. Narendranath, who was busy conducting a law suit pending at the court, used to spend the night at the monastery. He exhorted the others to join the brotherhood.

At this time, the mother of Baburam (Premananda), one of the brother-disciples, invited them all to her house in Antpur. Most of them accepted the invitation. This brought them all together and bound them with a single purpose. Narendranath, the leader of the group, reminded them of the words of Shri Ramakrishna and spoke to them eloquently of the glory of the monastic life. Inspired by his words, they all resolved to renounce the world and become monks. One night, they all gathered round a huge fire in the open, with the intention of spending the whole night in prayer and meditation. In the stillness of that night, when they had meditated for a long time, Narendranath related to them the story of Jesus and appealed to them all to imitate Christ's life and work, to realise God and deny themselves even as Christ had done, for the redemption of the world. Then and there they took the vows of Sannyasa, though the ritualistic formalities were gone through much later. What was their surprise when they discovered that it was Christmas Eve.

On returning to Calcutta, they renounced home once for all and joined the monastery. There they lived a life of severe austerity, meditation, study, and prayer. The centre of the *math* was, of course, the shrine room in

which one of them, Shasi (Ramakrishnananda), had installed the Master's relics and worshipped him there, feeling his living presence. The monks would get up at three o'clock in the morning, and would be immersed in meditation. Their meditation would continue throughout the day and sometimes even during the late hours of the night. They lived on what chance brought to them. There were days when they had nothing to eat. For months they lived on boiled leaves of the *bimba* creeper, salt, and rice. They had only two pieces of *kaupina* (loin-cloth) for use in the monastery, and an ordinary piece of cloth and a Chaddar (upper garment) for outdoor work. They slept on straw mats spread on the bare ground. But these inconveniences mattered little ; they were swept on by a wave of ecstatic love and devotion to the Master and the lofty ideals he preached.

Lest this devotion should become dammed up within the narrow limits of a creed or cult, the leader forced them to study the thought of the world outside. He himself instructed them in western and eastern philosophy, comparative religion, theology, history, sociology, literature, art, and science. He read out to them the great books of human thought, explained to them the evolution of the universal mind, discussed with them the problems of religion and philosophy, and led them indefatigably towards the wide horizons of the boundless truth which surpassed all limits of schools and races, and embraced and unified all particular truths. In the light of the teachings of Shri Ramakrishna, he reconciled the apparent contradictions between the various systems.

Thus the days passed in great joy at the monastery. But all the monks, except Shashi, felt restless for the life

of a wandering monk, and one by one they left the monastery in quest of solitude, depending entirely on the Lord. Narendranath, too, was eager to follow their footsteps. He was only restrained by his loyalty to the brotherhood at Baranagore, whose welfare Shri Ramakrishna had entrusted to his hands. When the desire became uncontrollable, he paid temporary visits to Vaidyanath, Simultala, Antpur, and other places in north India, mostly in the company of somebody, until he finally broke away from the monastery in 1891.

The Wandering Monk

Between the closing of 1888, when Narendranath first left on his temporary excursions, and the year 1891, when he parted from his brethren alone and as an unknown beggar, "to be swallowed up in the immensity of India", there came over him a remarkable change in outlook. When he first left in 1888, it was mainly to fulfil the natural desire of an Indian monk for a life of solitude. But when he left the monastery in 1891, it was to fulfil a great destiny. By then he had realised that his was not to be the life of an ordinary recluse struggling for personal salvation. Many times he had tried it: he had entered the deepest of Himalayan forests to lose himself in the silent meditation of the Absolute. Every time he had failed. Something or other brought him back from the depths of meditation to the midst of the suffering masses, beset with a thousand and one miseries. The sickness of a brother monk, or the death of a devotee, or the poverty at the Baranagore monastery, was enough to disturb him. More than all, the fever of the age, the misery of the time, and the mute appeal issuing from

the millions in oppressed and downtrodden India pained his heart. He lived in anguish during that period, in a seething cauldron as it were, and carried within himself a soul on fire whose embers took years to cool down. As he moved from place to place in the north, and later on in the south, studying closely the life of the people in all strata of society, he was deeply moved. He wept to see the stagnant life of the Indian masses crushed down by ignorance and poverty, and the spell of materialistic ideas among the educated who blindly imitated the glamour of the West but who never felt that they were the cause of India's degeneration and downfall. Spirituality was at a low discount in the very land of its birth. The picture of ancient India, once the envy of the world, came before his eyes vividly in all its grandeur and glory. The contrast was unbearable. Things should not be allowed to drift in this way. He visualised that India must become dynamic in all spheres of human activity and effect the spiritual conquest of the world, and he felt that he was the instrument chosen by the Lord to do it.

To resume the story, the first lap of his journey took him to Varanasi, Lucknow, Agra, Vrindaban, Hathras, and Rishikesh. At Varanasi, he met Pramadadas Mitra, a Sanskrit scholar with whom he was in correspondence regarding the Hindu social customs, the anomalies of the Hindu scriptures, the state of realisation, the authority of the Vedas, the injunctions of the Smritis, and other such subjects. At Hathras, he met his first disciple, Sharat Chandra Gupta (Swami Sadananda), to whom he revealed the mission entrusted to him by his Master, namely, the regeneration of India and the spiritual conquest of the world. Sharat, who was then the railway

station-master of the place and the host of his spiritual guide, then and there resigned his job and followed the Guru to help in his mission. They travelled together to Rishikesh, but had to return to Hathras owing to Sharat's illness. At Hathras, the master himself fell sick. So they returned to Baranagore.

After a year, in 1889, Narendranath left for Vaidyanath and thence to Allahabad to nurse a sick monastic brother. From there he went to Ghazipur to meet Pavhari Baba, attracted by the saint's pure and dedicated life. But he soon had to return to Calcutta. After two months' stay at the Baranagore monastery, in July 1890, he took leave of Shri Sarada Devi and the brother monks, not to return until he had attained such realisation as would enable him to transform a person by mere touch.

Narendranath then started for Almora with Akhandananda. On the way he passed through Vaidyanath, Varanasi, Ayodhya, and Nainital. It was at Varanasi that he told Pramadadas Mitra: "When I shall return here next time, I shall burst upon society like a bombshell, and it will follow me like a dog." How this declaration was fulfilled to the very letter is well known to all who know the later life story of Narendranath. At Nainital, he heard about the suicide of his sister under tragic circumstances, which made him ponder over the problems of Indian women. From Almora he visited Garhwal, Karnaprayag, Srinagar, Mussoorie, Dehra Dun, Rishikesh, Hardwar, and Meerut. He was accompanied by Saradananda, Akhandananda, and Vaikunthanath Sanyal (a householder disciple of Shri Ramakrishna). Swamis Turiyananda, Brahmananda, and Advaitananda joined the party at Mussoorie, Hardwar, and Meerut respectively. At Meerut, where they stayed for five

months, the leader took scriptural classes for the rest. Here, he surprised the librarian of the place by reading and mastering in one day Sir John Lubbock's works. Now he was seized with a desire to lead a solitary life and he bade goodbye to his brother disciples. It was January 1891.

From Meerut he proceeded to Delhi under the name of Vividishananda, assumed by him to hide his identity. There he accidentally met some of his Gurubhais, whom he sternly told not to follow him. He asked them to strive for the goal according to their own light. He reached Alwar in February 1891, met the Maharaja of the place, and discussed with him the various problems of India. This Maharaja was not a believer in image worship. One day the Swami asked some of his subordinates, in the presence of the Maharaja, to spit upon the ruler's photograph, saying that it was, after all, only paper. This horrified the subordinates, and it brought home to the Maharaja the rationale of image worship. While at Alwar, as in his wandering throughout the subcontinent, the Swami came in contact with the people of all strata, the rich and the poor, and exhorted the young students to study Sanskrit and western science, to revive the glory of the motherland, and to write an authentic history of the country following the scientific method of the West.

From Alwar the Swami went to Jaipur, where he studied with the help of a Pandit Pâtanjali's *Mahabhashya* on grammar. The Pandit having failed to make clear to him the meaning of the first *sutra* even after three days, he began studying it by himself, and with his power of concentration was able to grasp the meaning in three hours. Then he went to Ajmer. The summer

months of 1891 were spent at Mt. Abu. There he came in contact with the Maharaja of Khetri, who became his disciple, and remained one of the staunchest supporters of his work. He went to Khetri at the Maharaja's invitation, and resumed his study of *Mahabhashya* under another Pandit.

Then the Swami journeyed to Ahmedabad, where he lived on alms for several days, and with the help of Jain scholars enriched his knowledge of Jainism. He then visited Limdi, Junagadh, Bhuj, Kutch, Porbander and other important places in Western India and became acquainted with many princes and Dewans. The Dewan of Junagadh became a fast friend of his. At Porbander, where he arrived after visiting Verawal and Somnath (Prabhas), he stayed for eleven months, and helped the Dewan of the place, Pandit Shankar Pandurang, in translating the Vedas. He completed his study of the *Mahabhashya*, and learnt French at the instance of the Dewan, who suggested to him to go to the West, where his ideas were likely to be better appreciated. Hearing about the Parliament of Religions to be held at Chicago he expressed to his host at Porbander his desire to attend it.

In the last week of July 1892, he reached Bombay via Baroda and Khandwa, and left for Poona after a week. At Poona he stayed with Bala Gangadhar Tilak for a few days. His next halt was Kolhapur, where, too, he was the guest of the Maharaja. From there he went to Belgaum and thence to Bangalore. At Bangalore he lived in obscurity for some time, until he met the Dewan, K. Sheshadri Iyer. The Dewan was charmed by the Swami's magnetic personality, his wide learning and deep insight, and invited him to be his guest.

After three or four days, the Swami found himself the guest of the Maharaja of Mysore, Chamaraja Wadiar. In his talks with the Maharaja, he unburdened the heavy load he was, as it were, carrying on his head, and expressed his intention of going to the West to get funds to ameliorate the material condition of India. The Maharaja offered to bear the expenses. The Swami addressed an assembly of Pandits at Mysore palace on Vedanta. From Bangalore, he went to Trichur and Trivandrum. Then he visited Kanyakumari where, sitting on the prominent rock away from the coast, he reviewed his experiences during his wanderings and meditated deeply on the problems of India. The past, the present, and the future of India, the causes of her downfall, the means of her resurrection—all these flashed through his mind, and he took the momentous decision to go to the West to raise funds for the uplift of the Indian masses, by giving in exchange the rich spiritual treasures that India had accumulated through centuries, and which he himself had inherited from his Master. With this decision he proceeded to Madurai where he met the Raja of Ramnad, who became his disciple. The Raja also urged him to go to the West and offered him every help he could. Then he visited Rameshwaram.

From there he journeyed to Madras on foot. At Madras, a group of young men, headed by Alasinga Perumal, was eagerly waiting his arrival. On the way he visited Pondicherry. The young men, who had already heard about the Swami and intuitively recognised his greatness, welcomed him with great joy. In Madras he met eminent persons from various walks of life—lawyers, judges, college professors, Sanskrit

Pandits, members of the social reform movement—and with them he discussed different topics affecting the welfare of the country. He also revealed to them his intention of going to the West to attend the Parliament of Religions to be convened at Chicago. The group of young men who became his disciples whole-heartedly approved the idea, and encouraged him in the plan. They raised a subscription for his travel abroad. But he asked them to distribute it to the poor as he was not yet quite sure whether the plan was in accordance with the divine Will. A symbolic dream convinced him that he had the needed sanction. He saw the figure of Shri Ramakrishna walking from the seashore into the ocean beckoning him to follow. Further, the Holy Mother, Shri Sarada Devi, to whom he wrote for approval and blessings, communicated to him her consent and good wishes.

In the meantime, the young disciples again started raising subscriptions. Alasinga Perumal begged from door to door, mostly from the middle class people ; for the Swami had told him: "If it is the Mother's will that I should go, then let me receive the money from the people. Because it is for the people of India's sake that I am going to the West—for the people and the poor." The Swami paid a short visit to Hyderabad at the invitation of his friends and returned to Madras on 17th February 1893. In Hyderabad, he gave his first public lecture, "My Mission to the West".

While arrangements were being made for sailing, a sudden invitation came from the Maharaja of Khetri to go to his place, with the assurance that he would do everything for the trip. The Swami agreed to this. With the Maharaja he went to Jaipur, and from there

he left for Bombay alone. On the way to Bombay he halted for a night at the house of a railway employee, one of his hosts during his wandering days. At Mt. Abu he met Swamis Brahmananda and Turiyananda, to whom he said with great feeling: "I travelled all over India. But, alas, it was agony to me, my brothers, to see the terrible poverty of the masses, and I could not restrain my tears. It is now my firm conviction that to preach religion to them without trying to remove their poverty and suffering is futile. It is for this reason—to find means for the salvation of the poor of India—that I am going to America." To Turiyananda he said with profound sorrow and intense emotion: "Haribhai, I am still unable to understand anything of your so-called religion. But my heart has expanded very much, and I have learnt to feel (the sufferings of others). Believe me, I feel it very sadly."

The Swami sailed from Bombay on 31st May 1893. Alasinga Perumal, his devoted disciple, was there to bid him farewell. For it was the disciples of Madras and the Rajas of Ramnad and Mysore who had helped him financially for the voyage. Their help was complemented by the Maharaja of Khetri who gave him a first class ticket and a purse, and an outfit of clothing. Also, the Maharaja of Khetri requested him to assume the beautiful name, Vivekananda, by which he has become famous all over the world.

His First Journey to the West and the Parliament of Religions

On the way, the ship touched Colombo, Penang, Singapore, Hong Kong, Nagasaki, Kobe, and Yokohama, before she reached Vancouver in British

Columbia. The Swami took advantage of the three days' halt at Hong Kong to visit the Buddhist monasteries at Canton. He was agreeably surprised to find in Chinese and Japanese temples Sanskrit inscriptions in old Bengali characters. The distance from Kobe to Yokohama he covered by the land route, to visit on the way the premier cities of Japan, Osaka, Kyoto, and Tokyo. He was greatly impressed by the industrial progress made by Japan.

The Swami arrived in Vancouver shivering for want of warm clothing. Neither he nor the disciples in Madras, nor the Maharaja of Khetri, had any idea of the cold weather there. Greater surprises were awaiting him at Chicago. He reached Chicago by train after three days, and he was bewildered like a child. Next day he went to the World's Fair and marvelled at the power, riches, and inventive genius of the western world. For twelve days he watched with eager eyes the panorama of the latest machinery and products of art exhibited there. Then he visited the information bureau of the Universal Exposition to inquire about the details of the Parliament of Religions. He was shocked to learn that the Parliament was not to commence till after the first week of September and that no delegate would be admitted without proper credentials from a *bona fide* organisation. He further learnt that the time for admittance and registration of delegates was over. It was only the middle of July and the Swami had not with him any credentials whatever. He blamed himself for having foolishly listened to those "sentimental schoolboys of Madras", to none of whom it had occurred to make the necessary inquiries before sending him to such a distant land. They, in their

unbounded enthusiasm and faith, had taken it for granted that their Swami had only to appear and he would be given a chance. The Swami, too, did not foresee the difficulties in the way, as he was sure he was moving towards the fulfilment of a divine mission. Added to all this, to live in Chicago was very costly and he did not have enough money. He was, however, determined not to give up till the end, and Providence came to his rescue in a mysterious way.

He heard that living was cheaper at Boston, and decided to go there. On his way to Boston, a rich fellow-traveller in the train, Miss Katherine Abbott Sanborn, was attracted by his personality. She was pleased to learn the purpose of his coming to America and invited him to live in her village home, "Breezy Meadows", in Massachusetts, near Boston, until something better turned up. This invitation was a godsend for the Swami. His hostess used the Swami as a curio from India to be shown to her guests, but among them was Professor J. H. Wright of the Greek department of Harvard University. After a four-hour conversation with the Swami, the Professor was so impressed by his learning and wisdom that he took it upon himself to get him admitted to the Parliament of Religions as a delegate. He exclaimed: "To ask you, Swami, for your credentials is like asking the sun to state its right to shine!" He wrote to the Chairman of the Committee for the selection of delegates, who happened to be his friend: "Here is a man who is more learned than all our learned professors put together." He also gave him letters of introduction to the committee in charge of housing and providing for the oriental delegates, and purchased a ticket for the Swami for Chicago.

Unfortunately, when the Swami arrived at Chicago he found to his dismay that he had lost the address of the committee. Nobody cared to direct him. It was late at night, and he decided to sleep in a huge empty box in the railway freight-yard. In the morning, he set out to find his way. Soon, he was in one of the rich quarters of the city. Extremely tired and hungry, he sought help from house to house, as a Sannyasin would. Seeing his soiled clothes and worn-out appearance, the servants in some of the houses treated him rudely, and in some others slammed the door in his face. After some time, exhausted and resigning himself to the will of God, he sat down on the roadside. Just then, the door of a fashionable residence opposite opened, and a lady of regal appearance accosted him. Guessing that he was a delegate to the Parliament of Religions, she invited him to her house and attended to his immediate needs. Later, when the Swami had eaten and rested, she took him to the offices of the Parliament of Religions. He was accepted as a delegate and soon lodged with the other oriental delegates. The lady who went to the help of the Swami was Mrs. Hale, wife of Mr. George W. Hale. The husband and wife, whom the Swami used to address as "Father Pope" and "Mother Church" respectively, and their daughters, ever remained the Swami's most faithful friends. Some of the finest letters that the Swami wrote were to Miss Mary Hale, with whom he had closest relationship, and he always stayed with the Hale family whenever he went to Chicago in later years.

The Parliament of Religions was an adjunct of the World's Columbian Exposition, organised to celebrate the four hundredth anniversary of the discovery of

America by Christopher Columbus. One of the goals of the Exposition was to disseminate and enlighten the public on the progress made in the West in various branches of knowledge, especially in modern science and technology. Religion being an important factor in human civilisation a Parliament of Religions was summoned in conjunction with the Exposition.

The first session of the Parliament was held on Monday, 11th September 1893, in the spacious hall of the Art Palace ; and its huge galleries were packed with nearly 7,000 people—men and women representing the best culture of the country. Representatives of all organised religions—Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Shintoism, Mohammedanism, and Mazdaism—were there, and amongst them was Swami Vivekananda, who represented no particular sect. The Swami represented nothing and yet everything. There was a grand procession of delegates. Cardinal Gibbons, the highest Prelate of the Roman Catholic Church in the U.S.A., opened the meeting with a prayer and, after that, Dr. Barrows, the Chairman, introduced the delegates one by one. All of them, except Swami Vivekananda, read prepared speeches. The Swami was addressing a huge assembly for the first time, and his heart was fluttering and his tongue dried up. He was so nervous that he did not speak in the morning session. He went on postponing the summons from the chair.

In the end, when he could no longer put off his turn, he stepped up to the rostrum and, in his mind, bowing down to Saraswati Devi, began to speak. No sooner had he addressed the assembly "Sisters and Brothers of America" than there was deafening applause lasting for

full two minutes. The audience rose as one man to express heartfelt appreciation for the warm feelings which those five simple words conveyed to them. Others addressed them in the set way, but the Swami touched the deepest cord of their hearts by discarding the formality and stressing the kinship of humanity with such sincerity. After the applause had subsided, the Swami made a brief speech. He greeted the youngest of the nations in the name of the most ancient monastic order in the world—the Vedic order of Sannyasins—and in the name of Hinduism, the mother of religions, and her followers. He spoke of the special message of Hinduism, her tolerance and spirit of universality, mentioning how she had practically demonstrated this through the centuries by giving shelter to the persecuted of all religions. He pleaded for the adoption of this spirit of universal brotherhood by the other religions, too, and the termination of sectarianism, bigotry, and fanaticism. When he ended, a tremendous ovation ensued, and he sat down exhausted with emotion. The next day, all the papers lionised him as the greatest figure in the Parliament of Religions and declared in their columns that his speech was the best. He became known to the whole of the United States of America.

In his subsequent speeches in the Parliament, five in all, he again and again reiterated his theme of universal toleration, every time presenting it with new arguments and greater emphasis. In the final session on 27th September, he concluded his lecture with these words: "Holiness, purity, and charity are not the exclusive possessions of any church in the world, . . . every system has produced men and women of the most

exalted character. In the face of this evidence, if anybody dreams of the exclusive survival of his own religion and the destruction of the others, I pity him from the bottom of my heart and point out to him that upon the banner of every religion will soon be written, in spite of resistance: 'Help and not Fight', 'Assimilation and not Destruction', 'Harmony and Peace and not-Dissension'." (*Complete Works*, I, p. 24). The West came to know India through his speeches. But India's gain also was not less remarkable. In a paper on Hinduism read on the 19th, he spoke on the salient religious ideas of the Hindus. In the process, he had re-created Hinduism. Besides, his success made India conscious of her greatness.

The Swami, however, did not take this as a personal triumph. Although he had become famous overnight, and the doors of the rich were open to him, he wept over his victory, remembering his people at home, sunk in poverty and ignorance, for whose sake he had come to America. On the very night of his success, as he retired to bed, he cried out in despair, rolling in agony on the ground: "O Mother, what do I care for name and fame, when my motherland remains sunk in utmost poverty! To what a sad pass have we, poor Indians, come when millions of us die for want of a handful of rice, and here they spend millions of rupees upon their personal comfort. Who will raise the masses of India? Who will give them bread? Show me, O Mother, how I can help them!"

Work in America

In order to further the cause of India and to free himself from obligation to his wealthy friends, he

accepted the offer of a lecture bureau for a lecture tour of America. He thought that that would help him also in spreading his ideas. The tour took him round the large cities in the Eastern and Mid-Western States. Everywhere, people flocked to hear him. His speeches, delivered extempore, were mostly devoted to the exposition of religion and philosophy as preached and practised by the Hindus through the centuries. He also explained to the American audiences the Hindu manners, customs, and religious practices, removing some of the misconceptions spread through the monstrous and fantastic stories told by the Christian missionaries. The Swami also spoke with great reverence on Christ and his teachings and the valuable contribution of the West to the culture and civilisation of the world. He did not hide his admiration for the tremendous progress the West had made in the fields of industry and economics, as well as for the western democratic social system with equal opportunity for everyone. While he was never sparing in his praise of the good side of western civilisation, the hollowness of the western society—the tears behind the peal of laughter—became more and more apparent to him as he moved from city to city. He was mercilessly critical of the defects in European culture—the signs of brutality, inhumanity, pettiness, arrogance, and ignorance of other cultures—as he was severe in his criticism of the defects of Indian social customs like untouchability and other allied evils during his lectures from Colombo to Almora after his return from the West in 1897. The Swami's remarks on the insincerity of some of the Christian leaders and his reference to false Christianity enraged some Christian missionaries,

who started vilifying him. Some Indians, too, jealous of the Swami's success in the Parliament of Religions, joined the missionaries in their false propaganda. The Swami remained calm and unperturbed in the midst of these provocations, trusting in the ancient maxim: Truth alone triumphs, not falsehood.

The lecture tour gave the Swami an opportunity to see the different aspects of western life at close quarters. The vision of a mighty future civilisation in which the best in the East and in the West would be harmoniously blended began to flit across his mind. The Swami, however, soon became sick of what he termed "the nonsense of public life and newspaper blazoning". The lecture bureau had been advertising him as a curio and exploiting him fully to its own advantage; he received only a negligible portion of the collections made at his lectures. He felt disgusted with the bureau's behaviour and severed his connection with it. Besides, he found out that the interest he had created among the public was superficial; that was not what he wanted. Now he desired to teach only earnest students freely, living independently in a place of his own. He decided to arrange his lectures directly, free of charge, himself paying for the expenses. He accepted invitations from churches, clubs, and private gatherings, and travelled extensively through the eastern and mid-western States of America, delivering twelve to fourteen or more lectures a week. In Detroit, where he was the guest of Mrs. John J. Bagley and Mr. Thomas W. Palmer, he met Miss Greenstidel, who later became his disciple adopting the name Sister Christine and dedicating herself for life to his cause and work in India. In the summer months, he delivered a series of lectures at the

"Greenacre Conference", arranged by the Christian Scientists, spiritualists, faith healers, and others of that sort. He also taught Vedanta at Greenacre to a group of sincere students, sitting under a pine tree, in the Indian way. Invited by Dr. Lewis G. Janes, the president of the Brooklyn Ethical Association, he spoke on the Hindu religion before that Association. Between February and June 1895, he took classes in New York on Raja-Yoga and Jnana-Yoga. In June 1895, he had finished dictating to Miss S. E. Waldo, his famous book *Raja-Yoga*. Miss Waldo became a disciple, taking the name Sister Haridasi. The Swami acquired at New York some of his lifelong friends and admirers. Among them were Mrs. Ole Bull, wife of the celebrated Norwegian violinist; Miss Josephine MacLeod, who remained his staunch friend and helper in his cause; and Leon Landsberg and Madame Marie Louise, who were of great help during his first days in New York and who became his sannyasin disciples later at Thousand Island Park as Swamis Kripananda and Abhayananda respectively. The other notables whom the Swami met at New York were: Nicolas Tesla, the great electrician, Sir William Thomson (later Lord Kelvin), and Professor Helmholtz, two leading western scientists; Sarah Bernhardt, the famous French actress who greatly admired his teachings, and Madame Emma Calvé, a well-known *prima donna*, who described the Swami as one who "truly walked with God".

Thus the Swami's western work took him gradually beyond his original plan, which was just to raise money for the uplift of the Indian masses. He realised that his services could not be confined within narrow limits. He wrote to his disciples who were urging him to return

to India: "I have helped you all as I could. You must now help yourselves. What country has any special claim on me? Am I a nation's slave? I do not care whether they are Hindus, or Mohammedans, or Christians, but those that love the Lord will always command my service." He gave away most of his earnings through lectures to the charitable institutions there in America and asked his friends to do the same. He wholeheartedly devoted himself to the service of the West.

This attitude, however, was no mere *volte face*. It arose from the fact that he had become conscious of the full significance of his life's work. His mission was to the whole world, not to India only. He realised that his task was to preach the fundamental universal principles of religion, and to preach them to all countries. Later he was to assure India that only if she clung to those universal principles, which were her birthright, would her poverty and other problems be solved. To these universal principles he gave the name "Vedanta", which had not previously been given such a wide connotation. As Miss Marie Burke writes in *Swami Vivekananda in America*: "Never before had it been broadened into a philosophy and religion which included every faith of the world and every noble effort of man—reconciling spirituality and material advancement, faith and reason, science and mysticism, work and contemplation, service to man and absorption in God. Never before had it been conceived as the one universal religion, by accepting the principles of which the follower of any or no creed could continue along his own path and at the same time be able to identify himself with every other creed and aspect of religion." (p. 677).

The Herculean task of teaching Vedanta in a foreign land had completely worn him out; he needed rest badly. So, on the invitation of Mr. Francis H. Leggett, he went for a short stay at Percy, New Hampshire. Thence he proceeded to Thousand Island Park on the St. Lawrence where, at the earnest request of a few students, who were ready to put aside all other interests to study Vedanta, he agreed to hold classes for them. One of the students, Miss Dutcher, had offered her cottage for the purpose. There, under ideal surroundings, he taught those intimate students. The subjects discussed in that heavenly atmosphere surcharged with his spirituality were many. The Swami expounded to them such precious texts as the *Bhagavad-Gita* and the *Narada-Bhakti-Sutras,* with his mind always absorbed in Brahman. He himself said later that he was at his best at Thousand Island Park. One of the students records: "Of the wonderful weeks that followed, it is difficult to write. Only if one's mind were lifted to that high state of consciousness in which we lived for the time, could one hope to recapture the experience. We were filled with joy. . . . On the wings of inspiration, he carried us to the height which was his natural abode. . . . His first overwhelming desire was to show us the path of Mukti, to set us free. . . . His second object . . . was to train this group to carry on the work in America." There he reached one of his loftiest heights; the students saw ideas unfold and flower. He sought to awaken the heroic energy of the souls placed in his hands. He said: "If I could only set you free with a touch!" And how many were helped to freedom during his lifetime; Besides, the number of those who are being inspired to divinity by

his immortal message is on the increase as time rolls on.

After seven weeks of "inspired talks", he returned to New York by steamer. In the meantime, preparations were afoot for the Swami's departure for England in response to the invitations of Miss Henrietta Müller and Mr. E. T. Sturdy. Mr. Francis H. Leggett of New York, a wealthy businessman and a friend of the Swami, also invited him to go on a trip to Paris and to England as his guest. The Swami himself felt the need to preach Vedanta in England. So he arrived in London in September 1895, after a short visit to Paris. Soon, he started his classes, interviews, and public lectures which became popular. Miss Margaret E. Noble, who was running a school in Wimbledon, was among those who were greatly impressed by the teaching. Later, she became his disciple, and the Swami named her Nivedita (the dedicated one). She followed the Swami to India and worked for the education of Indian women.

The Swami returned to New York on 6th December, after three months' absence. He started classes on Karma-Yoga, living in an apartment with Swami Kripananda. He worked for two weeks incessantly, giving as many as seventeen lectures a week, besides carrying on a voluminous correspondence and granting numerous private interviews.

The Swami's lectures were always extempore. The disciples were eager to have them recorded. So they appointed Mr. J. J. Goodwin, a fast stenographer, who had just come to New York from England. Enlightened by the thought he was recording and transcribing, Goodwin refused remuneration, saying: "If Vivekananda gives his life, the least I can do is to give my

service." He worked day and night, accompanied the Swami wherever he went, and even attended to the Swami's personal needs. He took the vow of Brahmacharya, and followed the Swami to India.

The Swami spent the Christmas of 1895 with Mrs. Ole Bull at Boston. There he met Professor William James of Harvard University, who regarded him as a paragon of Vedantists and addressed him as "Master". The Swami gave a series of lectures in Brooklyn. At New York his famous lectures on Bhakti-Yoga were delivered. In February 1896, he ordained Dr. Street into sannyasa, giving him the name of Yogananda. The Harvard and Columbia Universities offered him the Chair of Eastern Philosophy, which he refused being a monk. By the spring of 1896, invitations came requesting him to revisit England. The earlier months of that year were spent in consolidating the work he had done. A concrete result of his New York work was the establishment of a Vedanta Society there, under the presidentship of Mr. Francis H. Leggett.

The Swami had seen by now the best and the worst of both the East and the West. He was now convinced that each had something to learn from the other. "I believe that the Hindu faith has developed the spiritual at the expense of the material," he said, "and I think that in the West the contrary is true. By uniting the materialism of the West with the spiritualism of the East, I believe much can be accomplished." In Detroit, he said: "May not one combine the energy of the lion and the gentleness of the lamb? Perhaps, the future holds the conjunction of the East and the West, a combination which would be productive of marvellous results." The problem was how to harmonise every-

thing without sacrificing anything. He had in his mind the plan of bringing his brother disciples to teach and preach Vedanta in America, and taking some of his American and English disciples to teach science, industry, economics, applied sociology, organisation, and co-operation in India. Swami Saradananda had already arrived in London, and Swami Abhedananda was to come. That, however, would not go far unless there was a complete and thorough reorganisation of the great religious and philosophical thought of India on a sound national and universal basis. Then alone could Indian thought recover its dynamic drive and progressive power to advance and spiritualise the West. For this purpose, he seriously thought of writing a book. He revealed this idea of his to Alasinga, his disciple, thus: "Now, I will tell you my discovery. All of religion is contained in Vedanta, that is, the three stages of the Vedanta philosophy—the Dvaita, Vishishtadvaita, and Advaita; one comes after the other. These are the three stages of spiritual growth in man. Each one is necessary. This is the essential of religion. The Vedanta applied to the various ethnic customs and creeds of India is Hinduism. The first stage, Dvaita, applied to the idea of ethnic groups of Europe is Christianity; as applied to the Semitic groups, Mohammedanism. The Advaita as applied in its Yoga perception form is Buddhism, etc. Now by religion is meant Vedanta. The application must vary according to the different needs, surroundings, and other circumstances of different nations. ...I wish to write a book on this subject; therefore, I want the three Bhashyas." (Ibid. V, 82-83). He wrote to Mr. Sturdy: "I quite agree with you that only the Advaita philosophy can save

mankind, whether in East or West, from devil worship and kindred superstitions, giving tone and strength to the very nature of man." (Ibid., VIII, 337).

Second Visit to London

The Swami sailed for England for the second time on 15th April 1896. This visit of his was marked by three important events: first, his lectures on Jnana-Yoga which were later published in book form ; second, his meeting with Professor Max Müller, the German Sanskritist and Indologist ; and third, the Seviers' becoming his disciples.

The Jnana-Yoga lectures were delivered in the beginning of May 1896. The Swami met the Indologist on 28th May. The professor had already written an article for the *Nineteenth Century* entitled "The Real Mahatman" which was later elaborated into *Ramakrishna: His Life and Sayings.* Greatly impressed by Professor Max Müller, the Swami contributed an article to the *Brahmavadin* describing the meeting.

The Seviers' acquaintance with the Swami came about thus. After listening to one of the Swami's lectures, Captain Sevier, a retired officer of the British army, asked Miss MacLeod: "You know this young man? Is he what he seems?" Miss MacLeod answered: "Yes." "In that case, one must follow him and with him find God", said Mr. Sevier. The Captain, with his wife, had sought the highest truth in various sects and creeds, but nowhere could they find it. He went to his wife and asked her: "Will you let me become the Swami's disciple?" "Yes," she said, and asked him in turn: "Will *you* let *me* become the Swami's

disciple?" "I am not so sure!" replied her husband with affectionate humour. The very first time the Swami met Mrs. Sevier, he addressed her as "Mother"; and asked her if she would not like to go to India. He told her, "I will give you my best realisations." The couple forthwith resolved to follow the Swami to India.

The Swami was exhausted with the heavy work in London, and so at the end of July, the Seviers and Miss Henrietta Müller took him to the Continent for a holiday tour. They passed through Dover and Calais, and visited Paris, Geneva, the famous retreat of Chamounix, and the glacier Mer-de-Glace. In the Alps, the Swami enjoyed himself thoroughly. "Never have I seen the Swami to such advantage. He seemed to communicate spirituality by a look or a touch", related Mrs. Sevier later. It was to the Seviers, while travelling in the Alps that the Swami expressed his desire to have a monastery in the Himalayas, where he would retire at the end of his life, and where his eastern and western disciples would live and practise and train themselves to work for the spiritual and material uplift of the West and the East respectively. The Seviers took up the idea as the mission of their life and gave shape to it by founding the Advaita Ashrama at Mayavati.

After visiting some other places in Switzerland, they went to Kiel where they met Paul Deussen, the renowned Indologist and Professor of Philosophy at the Kiel University. On the way they halted at Lucerne, Zermatt, Schaffhausen, Heidelberg, Coblenz, Cologne, and Berlin. Deussen and the Swami discussed many topics of common interest. Deussen took the Swami round the city. After nearly six weeks' holiday the Swami and party returned to London, via Hamburg

and Amsterdam, and he resumed his classes and lectures. He was very much impressed by the work of this period. "In England, my work is really splendid", he wrote to a disciple in Madras.

Return of the Hero

Though the Swami was completely absorbed in his work in the West, he never forgot about his original mission. He was constantly in correspondence with his disciples in Madras and elsewhere, guiding, instructing, and encouraging them to push on with the work in India. In his immortal letters, detailed instructions were given about organising the work. To quote only a few of his inspiring words: "Work hard, be steady, and have faith in the Lord. . . . Keep the motto before you—'Elevation of the masses without injuring their religion'. . . the fate of a nation does not depend upon the number of husbands their widows get, but upon the *condition of the masses.* Can you raise them? Can you give them back their lost individuality? . . . This is to be done and *we will do it.* You are all *born to do it.* Have faith in yourselves, great convictions are the mothers of great deeds." (*Complete Works,* 1963, V. 29-30). "I believe that the Satya Yuga (Golden Age) will come when there will be one caste, one Veda, and peace, and harmony. This idea of Satya Yuga is what would revivify India. Believe it." (ibid., 31) "Believe, believe, the decree has gone forth, the fiat of the Lord has gone forth—India must rise, the masses and the poor are to be made happy. Rejoice that you are the chosen instruments in His hands. The flood of spirituality has risen." (ibid., 35) "A huge spiritual tidal wave is coming

—he who is low shall become noble, and he who is ignorant shall become the teacher of great scholars—through His grace. . . . He alone is a child of Shri Ramakrishna who is moved to pity for all creatures and exerts himself for them even at the risk of incurring personal damnation. . . . This is the test, he who is Ramakrishna's child does not seek his personal good. They wish to do good to others even when at the point of death. . . . Propagate his character, his teachings, his religion. This is the only spiritual practice, the only worship, this verily is the means, and this the goal. . . . Onward! Onward! There is not time to care for name, or fame, or Mukti, or Bhakti! We shall look to these some other time. . . . I only tell you this, that whoever reads this letter will imbibe my spirit! Have faith!" (ibid., VI. 294-95). "Onward, my lads! The whole world requires light. It is expectant! India alone has that light, not in magic mummeries, and charlatanism, but in the teachings of the glories of the spirit of real religion—of the highest spiritual truth. That is why the Lord has preserved the race through all its vicissitudes unto the present day. . . . Have faith that you are all, my brave lads, born to do great things." (ibid., V. 43). "Shall India die? Then from the world all spirituality will be extinct, all moral perfection will be extinct, all sweet-souled sympathy for religion will be extinct, all ideality will be extinct; and in its place will reign the duality of lust and luxury as the male and female deities, with money as its priest, fraud, force, and competition its ceremonies, and the human soul its sacrifice. Such a thing can never be. . . . India will be raised, not with the power of the flesh, but with the power of the spirit; not with the flag of

destruction, but with the flag of peace and love ; . . . not by the power of wealth, but by the power of the begging bowl. . . . But one vision I see clear as life before me is that the ancient Mother has awakened once more, sitting on Her throne—rejuvenated, more glorious than ever. (ibid., IV. 348, 352, 353).

In the middle of November 1896, he suddenly decided that he must go back to India. So he asked Mrs. Sevier, after a class talk, to book their berths for India from Naples by the earliest steamer available. On 16th December the Swami left London with the Seviers and visited Dover, Calais, Mont Cenis, City of Pisa, Florence, Rome, Vesuvius, and Pompeii, before taking the boat at Naples on 30th December 1896. In Rome, at St. Peter's, he was struck by the resemblance between the Christian liturgy and the Indian ceremonies. At Naples, Mr. Goodwin joined the party, and they arrived in Colombo on 15th January 1897.

The news of the Swami's return had already reached India. He was no longer the unknown, wandering Sannyasin. The great work he had done for India in the West had become known throughout India. From Colombo to Madras, in all the important cities, committees consisting of all sections of the society had been formed to accord him a fitting reception. Two of his brother disciples and others from the north hastened to Ceylon and to Madras to receive him. Everywhere, people gathered in hundreds to have his *darshana* and pay him homage. There were grand processions along richly decorated streets strewn with flowers ; and triumphal arches, religious chants, addresses of welcome, and suitable replies by the Swami were the order of the day. Incense was burnt before the houses, and the

sacred water of the Ganga and rose water were sprinkled on him. The newspapers carried editorials on the Swami. At Ramnad, where he arrived on 26th January, the Raja of Ramnad himself drew the carriage in which the Swami was being taken in procession. Inspired by the Swami's message, he fed thousands of the poor. But the grandest reception awaited the hero at Madras, where the admirers were expecting him for weeks in feverish excitement. Madras had been mainly instrumental in sending the Swami to the West, and so it was but natural that that city should give him a hero's reception. He was taken in procession through the streets which were profusely decorated with triumphal arches, flags, festoons, and flowers. Thousands gathered in the streets just to have a look at him, and during his stay there he was presented with twenty-four addresses of welcome in various languages. The horses of the carriage in which he was conducted were unharnessed, and the citizens themselves drew it. The public life of the city was suspended for nine days. He was accommodated in the Castle Kernan, a palatial building belonging to Mr. Biligiri Iyengar.

All along the route of his tour, specially in Jaffna and Kumbakonam, he gave inspiring lectures, reminding the people of the glory of India's past and exhorting them to apply themselves to the task of raising her to her ancient splendour. But it was in Madras that he gave full expression to his ideas. On the third day after his arrival, a public address of welcome was presented to him at the Victoria Hall, but it was too small to contain the large gathering. The Swami at the insistent demand of the enthusiastic public waiting outside, spoke to them in the open from the top of a

coach in "the Gita fashion", urging them to maintain their enthusiasm and utilise it for the service of India. During his stay in Madras the Swami gave five public lectures, the subjects selected being "My Plan of Campaign", "The Sages of India", "Vedanta in Its Relation to Practical Life", "The Work before Us", and "The Future of India". In these, the Swami addressed the whole of India, and here one finds his message to India expressed in the most inspiring language.

Let us listen to a few of his soul-stirring words: "I see that each nation, like each individual, has one theme in this life, which is its centre, the principal note round which every other note comes to form the harmony. In one nation political power is its vitality, as in England, artistic life in another, and so on. In India, religious life forms the centre, the keynote of the whole music of national life. . . . Therefore, if you succeed in the attempt to throw off your religion and take up either politics, or society, or any other things as your centre, as the vitality of your national life, the result will be that you will become extinct. . . . Every man has to make his own choice; so has every nation. We made our choice ages ago, and we must abide by it. And, after all, it is not such a bad choice. Is it such a bad choice in this world to think not of matter but of spirit, not of man but of God? . . . The first work that demands our attention is that the most wonderful truths confined in our Upanishads, in our scriptures, in our Puranas, must be brought out from the books, brought out from the monasteries, brought out from the forests, brought out from the possession of selected bodies of people, and scattered broadcast all over the land, so that these truths may run like fire all

over the country. . . . my plan is to start institutions in India, to train our young men as preachers of the truths of our scriptures in India and outside India. Men, men, these are wanted; everything else will be ready, but strong, vigorous, believing young men, sincere to the backbone, are wanted. A hundred such and the world becomes revolutionised. . . . For centuries people have been taught theories of degradation. They have been told that they are nothing. The masses have been told all over the world that they are not human beings. They have been so frightened for centuries, till they have nearly become animals. Never were they allowed to hear of the Atman. Let them hear of the Atman. . . . Let them have faith in themselves. . . . What we want is muscles of iron and nerves of steel. We have wept long enough. . . . stand on your feet and be men. It is a man-making religion that we want. It is man-making theories that we want. It is man-making education all round that we want. And here is the test of truth—anything that makes you weak physically, intellectually, and spiritually, reject as poison; there is no life in it, it cannot be true. Truth is strengthening. Truth is purity, truth is all-knowledge; truth must be strengthening, must be enlightening, must be invigorating. . . . I love my nation, I cannot see you degraded, weakened any more than you are now. Therefore I am bound for your sake and for truth's sake to cry, 'Hold!' and to raise my voice against this degradation of my race. Give up these weakening mysticisms and be strong. Go back to your Upanishads—the shining, the strengthening, the bright philosophy—and part from all these mysterious things, all these weakening things. Take

up this philosophy ; the greatest truths are the simplest things in the world, simple as your own existence. The truths of the Upanishads are before you. Take them up, live up to them, and the salvation of India will be at hand." (ibid., III. 220-25).

"Bring all light into the world. Light, bring light! Let light come unto everyone ; the task will not be finished till everyone has reached the Lord. Bring light to the poor ; and bring more light to the rich, for they require it more than the poor. Bring light to the ignorant, and more light to the educated, for the vanities of the education of our time are tremendous! Thus bring light to all and leave the rest unto the Lord, for in the words of the same Lord, 'To work you have the right and not to the fruits thereof'. 'Let not your work produce results for *you,* and at the same time may you never be without work.'" (ibid., 247).

"We must have a hold on the spiritual and secular education of the nation. . . . Till then there is no salvation for the race. The education that you are getting . . . is not a man-making education, it is merely and entirely a negative education. A negative education or any training that is based on negation, is worse than death. The child is taken to the school, and the first thing he learns is that his father is a fool, the second thing that his grandfather is a lunatic, the third thing that all his teachers are hypocrites, the fourth that all the sacred books are lies! By the time he is sixteen he is a mass of negation, lifeless and boneless. And the result is that fifty years of such education has not produced one original man in the three Presidencies. . . . Education is not the amount of information that is put into your brain and runs riot

there, undigested, all your life. We must have life-building, man-making, character-making, assimilation of ideas. If you have assimilated five ideas and made them your life and character, you have more education than any man who has got by heart a whole library. . . . The ideal, therefore, is that we must have the whole education of our country, spiritual and secular, in our own hands, and it must be on national lines through national methods as far as practical." (ibid., 301-02).

Having given a definite direction to the enthusiasm of the people in such stirring words, the Swami sailed for Calcutta, arriving there on Monday, 15th February 1897. In Calcutta also he was given a grand welcome and reception. In his reply to the address of welcome given him on the following day by the citizens of Calcutta, he paid a touching tribute to his Master, Shri Ramakrishna. He said: "If there has been anything achieved by me, by thoughts, or words, or deeds, if from my lips has ever fallen one word that has helped anyone in the world, I lay no claim to it, it was his. But if there have been curses falling from my lips, if there has been hatred coming out of me, it is all mine and not his. All that has been weak has been mine, and all that has been life-giving, strengthening, pure, and holy, has been his inspiration, his words, and he himself. . . . Through thousands of years of chiselling and modelling, the lives of the great prophets of yore come down to us ; and yet, in my opinion, not one stands so high in brilliance as that life which I saw with my own eyes, under whose shadow I have lived, at whose feet I have learnt everything—the life of Ramakrishna Paramahamsa. . . . If this nation wants to rise,

take my word for it, it will have to rally enthusiastically round his name. . . . Judge him not through me. I am only a weak instrument. Let not his character be judged by seeing me. It was so great that if I or any other of his disciples spent hundreds of lives, we could not do justice to a millionth part of what he really was. Judge for yourselves; in the heart of your hearts is the Eternal Witness, and may He, the same Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, for the good of our nation, for the welfare of our country, and for the good of humanity, open your hearts, make you true and steady to work for the immense change which must come, whether we exert ourselves or not. He can raise His workers from the dust by hundreds and by thousands. For the work of the Lord does not wait for the like of you or me. . . . It is a glory and a privilege that we are allowed to work at all under him." (ibid., III. 312, 313, 315-16).

While in Calcutta, the Swami spent the daytime in Seal's garden house, and the nights at the Alambazar Math, where his brother disciples had removed the monastery from Baranagore during his absence. There he met the people, especially young men and students, to whom he explained his mission.

During his talks and conversations with friends and disciples, he always emphasised the main theme of his life, namely the regeneration of India through renunciation and service. When a young man complained that he was not having peace of mind in spite of long hours of meditation with doors shut and eyes closed, the Swami told him: "My boy, if you take my word, you will have first of all to open the door of your room and look around, instead of closing your eyes. There are hundreds of poor and helpless people in your

neighbourhood; . . . serve them to the best of your ability; . . . feed those who have nothing to eat; . . . teach the ignorant. My advice to you is that if you want peace of mind, you shall have to serve others to the best of your ability." To a professor who thoughtlessly said that the Swami's ideas of service and doing good to others were all in the domain of Maya and that Mukti alone is the goal of life, he said: "Now I have no desire for Mukti. I do not care for it as long as a single individual in the universe remains in bondage." He addressed four new Sannyasins, whom he ordained after his return from a fortnight's rest at Darjeeling, thus: "Remember, for the salvation of one's own soul and for the good of the world, a Sannyasin is born. To sacrifice his own life for others, to alleviate the misery of millions, to wipe away the tears from the eyes of the widows, to console the heart of the bereaved mother, to provide the ignorant and depressed masses with knowledge and the power to stand on their own feet, to preach broadcast to one and all the teachings of the Shastras—the Sannyasin is born." When some of his brother disciples criticised his ideas of service, preaching, and the like as being of foreign origin and not in accordance with the teachings of Shri Ramakrishna, he reminded them of Shri Ramakrishna's words: Religion is not for empty stomachs. In a fit of emotion he burst out: "You think you have understood Shri Ramakrishna better than myself. You think Jnana is dry knowledge to be attained by a desert path, killing out the faculties of the heart. Your Bhakti is sentimental nonsense which makes one impotent. You want to preach Shri Ramakrishna as you have understood him, which is mighty little!

Hands off!" Thereafter the brother disciples, who remembered Shri Ramakrishna's high opinion of the Swami's superior spirituality and who bore him great love, obeyed him implicitly without a murmur. Swami Akhandananda, who had done some educational work in Rajputana, now went to Murshidabad to organise famine relief work, and later to Sargachi to begin a school for orphans. Also, at his behest, Swami Ramakrishnananda, who had never stirred out of the Math since its inception, left for Madras to found a monastery there. Swamis Shivananda and Trigunatitananda went to Ceylon and Dinajpur to do propaganda and famine relief work respectively. His own disciples also moved to different places, preaching and doing philanthropic work.

Work in India

For the purpose of establishing his work on a firm basis, the Swami summoned all the monastic and lay disciples of Shri Ramakrishna to a meeting at Balaram Bose's house on 1st May 1897. He told them that he had come to the conclusion that without an organisation nothing great and permanent could be achieved, and proposed that an association be formed in the name of the Master known as the Ramakrishna Mission. The aims and ideals of the Mission as propounded by the Swami were purely spiritual and humanitarian. The Mission had nothing to do with politics. Suitable resolutions were passed to this effect and the Ramakrishna Mission came into being. The Swami himself became the General President, Swami Yogananda the Vice-President, and Swami Brahmananda the President of the Calcutta centre.

The Swami now felt relieved to a certain extent: he had inaugurated the machinery for carrying out his ideas. But his health had not been good for some time and, on the advice of the doctors, he left for Almora with some brother monks and disciples. Miss Müller and Mr. Goodwin were already at Almora. After two and a half months' stay there, he left for Ambala where he met the Seviers. Visiting some places in the Punjab, and Srinagar in Kashmir, he went to Jammu where he met the Maharaja of Kashmir and discussed with him the question of starting a monastery in Srinagar. He returned to Calcutta in the middle of January 1898, halting on the way at Lahore, Khetri, Alwar, and some other places, where he addressed meetings, inspiring people as he had done in Madras and Calcutta. He also met some important persons in all the places, amongst whom was Mr. Tirtha Ram Goswami, then a professor of Mathematics in Lahore. Tirtha Ram was much influenced by the Swami. He took Sannyasa later and became famous as Swami Ram Tirtha.

To fulfil the Swami's cherished dream of having a permanent monastery on the Ganga, a plot of land was secured at Belur, near Calcutta, early in 1898, and the Math was removed to Nilambar Mukherjee's garden house at Belur, to be near the new site which needed much improvement. During this period, he initiated Sister Nivedita and Swami Swarupananda into *brahmacharya* and *sannyasa* respectively. On 30th March he went to Darjeeling for a change, but returned to Calcutta on 3rd May on hearing that plague had broken out there. Immediately he made plans for relief work with the help of the members of the

monastery and volunteers from the city. Sister Nivedita was in charge of the relief operations. When a brother disciple asked him where he would get the funds from, the Swami replied: "Why, we shall sell, if necessary, the land which has just been purchased for the monastery." This extreme step was, however, not necessary.

After the plague had been brought under control, the Swami left Calcutta, on 11th May for Naini Tal, Almora, and other places, with some of his brother disciples, and western disciples, Sister Nivedita, Mrs. Ole Bull, and Miss MacLeod. On this trip, the main concern of the Swami was the training of the disciples, especially Sister Nivedita, who had cut off all her associations in England and come away to India once for all to dedicate herself to the education of Indian women. He explained to the western disciples with great patience the Hindu ideals and gave them a glimpse of the real India.

In Almora, the Swami heard the news of the death of Goodwin and exclaimed in bitter grief: "My right hand is gone." Before leaving Almora, he arranged to restart, at Almora, the monthly magazine *Prabuddha Bharata,* which had ceased publication at Madras on the premature death of its gifted editor, B. R. Rajam Iyer.

On 11th June, the Swami left for Kashmir as the guest of Mrs. Ole Bull. The trip to Kashmir was an unforgettable experience both to the Swami and the disciples. From 21st to 25th June, the entire time was spent in *dungas* on the river Jhelum in and around Srinagar, with excursions to nearby places. At the end of July 1898, the Swami left with Sister Nivedita on a

pilgrimage to the holy shrine of Amarnath. The Swami moved with the thousands of pilgrims trekking their way to the shrine, observing scrupulously the humble practices demanded by custom—he would bathe in the holy waters, fast and pray, tell his beads, offer flowers, fruits, etc. to the deities. On 2nd August he entered the famous shrine of Amarnath, his body besmeared with ashes and wearing only a loin-cloth. His whole frame was shaking with emotion, and his face was aflame with supreme devotion to Lord Shiva. As he knelt before the ice-linga, he was almost in a trance; a great mystical experience came over him, of which he never spoke beyond saying that Shiva Himself had appeared before him and had bestowed His grace—not to die until he himself chose to do so. He told his disciples: "The image *was* the Lord Himself. It was all worship there. I have never seen anything so beautiful, so inspiring." For days together, there was no other talk on his lips except Shiva, the Lord of Immortality (Amarnath)—so saturated was he with the experience.

On 8th August he returned to Srinagar, along with his disciples, and they remained there till 11th October. During this time, the Swami went off in his boat alone for some days in order to be in strict solitude. He was then possessed by the divine Mother Kali. Wherever he turned, he told his disciples, he was conscious of the presence of the Mother, as if She were a person in the room. Once he worshipped a little four-year old girl, daughter of a Mohammedan boatman, seeing the divine Mother in her. One evening, after an intense meditation, he had a vision of Kali, the Terrible, and he jotted down his experience in the form of a poem, *Kali the Mother*. As he finished the poem, he dropped to the

floor unconscious, his soul soaring into the highest form of *bhava-samadhi*. Following this experience, on 30th September, the Swami retired abruptly to the shrine of Kshir Bhavani, alone, leaving strict injunctions that none should follow him. There he daily performed Homa and worshipped the Mother with Kshira (thickened milk) and told his beads like a humble pilgrim. He also worshipped every morning a Brahmin's little daughter as Uma Kumari, the divine virgin. He was full of the Mother. Once, seeing the dilapidated condition of the temple, the result of Mohammedan vandalism, he thought within himself: "If I were here then, I would never have allowed such things. I would have laid down my life to protect the Mother." Immediately, he heard the voice of the Mother: "What, even if unbelievers should enter My temples, and defile My images? What is that to you? Do *you* protect Me? Or do *I* protect you?" The Swami, recounting the experience later, said: "All my patriotism is gone. Everything is gone. Now it is only 'Mother! Mother!' " He returned to Srinagar on 6th October, and on 11th the whole party left for Baramulla and Lahore. From Lahore, the Swami returned to Calcutta with Swami Sadananda, commissioning Swami Saradananda to escort the disciples to other places in the north. He reached Calcutta on 18th October.

When the Swami arrived at the Belur monastery, the brother disciples saw him pale and ill. He suffered from suffocating fits of asthma. In spite of this, he plunged himself into numerous activities. The new house of the monastery had by now been completed, and the consecration ceremony of the Math took place on 9th December 1898. On that occasion, while he was carry-

ing the urn containing the relics of Shri Ramakrishna to the place where it was to be installed, he remarked: "It would be a centre in which would be recognised and practised the grand harmony of all creeds and faiths as exemplified in the life of Shri Ramakrishna and only ideas of religion in its universal aspect would be preached. And from this centre of universal toleration would go forth the shining message of goodwill and peace and harmony to deluge the whole world." In January 1899, the monks moved to the new site, the now famous Belur Math, the permanent headquarters of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. The initial expenses were mainly borne by Miss Henrietta Müller and Mrs. Ole Bull.

On 12th November 1898, the dedication of the Sister Nivedita Girls' School was performed by the Holy Mother, Shri Sarada Devi. On 14th January 1899, the Bengali monthly *Udbodhan* was started. The dream of the Swami to start a monastery in the Himalayas was also realised during this period, through the efforts of Capt. and Mrs. Sevier. The Advaita Ashrama was established at Mayavati, in the heart of the Himalayas, at an altitude of 6,300 ft. on 19th March 1899. The Swami laid down the ideals and principles of that monastery in the following lines: "Here it is hoped to keep Advaita free from all superstitions and weakening contaminations. Here will be taught and practised nothing but the Doctrine of Unity, pure and simple; and though in entire sympathy with all other systems, this Ashrama is dedicated to Advaita and Advaita alone." To this new place, the *Prabuddha Bharata* was removed from Almora.

During these days, the Swami was in an indrawn mood

most of the time. "Ever since I went to Amarnath, Shiva Himself has entered into my brain. He will not go" he used to say. But he was ever eager to help sincere souls, and appeared to be full of love for everybody, even those who led indifferent lives. If anybody objected, he would reply: "The poor souls have knocked at every gate to get a little peace of mind. They have been refused everywhere. ... If I too refuse them, they will have nothing to fall back upon." His main concern, however, was the training of the young Sannyasins and Brahmacharins, who were to carry on his work in the future. He encouraged them to develop an all-round personality, himself setting the example. He arranged study classes for them. He told them: "You will go to hell if you seek your own salvation. Seek the salvation of others if you want to reach the Highest." "You must try to combine in your life immense idealism with immense practicality. You must be prepared to go into deep meditation now, and the next moment you must be ready to go and cultivate the fields. You must be prepared to explain the intricacies of the scriptures now, and the next moment to go and sell the produce of the fields in the market. . . . The true man is he who is strong as strength itself and yet possesses a woman's heart."

But the Swami's health was failing. So, when he announced his plan to revisit the West to inspect the work he had founded there and to give it a fillip, the monks welcomed it thinking that it would help improve his health.

Second Visit to the West

The Swami left India on 20th June 1899, along with Swami Turiyananda and Sister Nivedita. The

journey with the Swami was an education to both of them. Sister Nivedita wrote: "From the beginning to the end a vivid flow of thought and stories went on. One never knew what moment would bring the flash of intuition and the ringing utterance of some fresh truth." They arrived in New York on 16th August 1899, touching London on 31st July on the way. The trip was beneficial to the Swami's health. In America he visited California, Los Angeles, Oakland, as well as Chicago and Detroit. The main event of this period was the starting of the Shanti Ashrama in Northern California. He told Swami Turiyananda, whom he asked to take charge of the centre: "Hoist the flag of Vedanta there; from this moment destroy even the memory of India." He also started the Vedanta Society of San Francisco in 1900.

The Swami was becoming more and more aware of the approaching end. He wrote to Miss MacLeod: "My boat is nearing the calm harbour from which it is never more to be driven out." He wanted to retire from all work.

On 1st August 1900, he arrived in Paris to participate in the Congress of the History of Religions, held there on the occasion of the Universal Exposition. He took part in only two sessions. Among the distinguished persons he came in contact with in Paris were: Professor Patrick Geddes of Edinburgh University, Hiram Maxim of machine-gun fame, and Dr. J. C. Bose, the Indian scientist.

On 24th October 1900, he left Paris for the East, by way of Vienna and Constantinople. With him were Monsieur Charles Loyson (formerly Père Hyacinthe) and his wife, Monsieur Jules Bois, Madame Calvé, and Miss

MacLeod. The party visited Hungary, Serbia, Rumania, and Bulgaria, before arriving at Constantinople. Then they proceeded to Athens and Cairo.

In Cairo, the Swami suddenly became restless to return to India ; he had a presentiment of Capt. Sevier's death. He took the first available boat and hurried back to India, alone.

Last Years in India

Immediately after arrival in Bombay, he left for Calcutta, and reached Belur Math late in the evening of 9th December, 1900, without any previous intimation. The gates of the monastery were closed for the night. Hearing the dinner bell, in his eagerness to join the monks at their meal, he scaled the gate. There was great rejoicing over the hero's home-coming.

At the Math, he heard of the passing away of Capt. Sevier at Mayavati, which happened on 28th October 1900. He stayed at the Math for eighteen days and left for Mayavati to console Mrs. Sevier, reaching there on 3rd January 1901.

After a fortnight's stay, he left Mayavati on 18th January and arrived at the Math on 24th. After seven weeks' stay in the Math, he left for East Bengal on a lecture tour. His mother, who had expressed an earnest desire to visit the holy places there, went with him. "This is the one great wish of a Hindu widow", he wrote to Mrs. Bull. "I have brought only misery to my people. I am trying to fulfil this one wish of hers." He returned to the Math in the second week of May 1901, visiting on the way Kamakhya and Shillong in Assam. It was at Shillong that he expressed the great impact of

his work and mission. "What does it matter!", he said, "I have given them enough for fifteen hundred years."

Now the Swami tried to lead a carefree life at the monastery, surrounded by his pets: the dog Bagha, the she-goat Hansi, an antelope, a stork, several cows and sheep and ducks and geese, and a kid which he named Matru. He used to run and play with Matru like a child. He would roam about the Math grounds, sometimes clad in his loin-cloth ; or he would supervise the cooking arrangements; or be with the monks singing devotional songs. Sometimes he would be seen imparting spiritual instruction to the visitors, at other times engaged in serious study in his room or explaining to the members of the Math the intricate passages of the scriptures and unfolding to them his scheme of future work. He freed himself entirely from all formal duties by executing a deed of trust in favour of his brother disciples, investing in them all the properties, including the Belur Math so far held in his name. Swami Brahmananda was elected President. Still he kept a careful watch on the life in the monastery, in spite of his physical suffering, and he was obeyed unquestioningly by all including the President. He looked to every detail—cleanliness, meals, study, meditation, work. He drew up a weekly time-table and saw to it that it was scrupulously followed. The classes on the Vedas and the Puranas were held daily, he himself conducting them when his health permitted. The bell sounded at fixed hours for meals, study, discussion, and meditation. About three months before his death, he made it a rule that at four o'clock in the morning a handbell should be rung from room to room to awaken the monks. Within half an hour all were to gather in the chapel

for meditation. He was always there before them. He got up at three and went to the chapel, where he meditated for more than two hours. As he got up, he used to chant softly "Shiva! Shiva!". His presence in the chapel created an intense spiritual atmosphere. Swami Brahmananda used to say: "Ah! one at once becomes absorbed if one sits for meditation in the company of Naren. I do not feel this when I sit alone." Once when Swami Premananda was going to the chapel for worship the Swami suddenly said, shaking with emotion: "Where will you go to seek Brahman? He is immanent in all beings. Here, here is the visible Brahman. Shame on those who, neglecting the visible Brahman, set their minds on other things! Here is the visible Brahman before you as tangible as a fruit in one's hand. Can't you see? Here, here is the Brahman."

In the later part of 1901, the Swami fed sumptuously a number of Santhal labourers engaged in digging the grounds about the monastery. He said to a disciple: "I actually see God in them. How guileless they are!"

Towards the end of 1901, two learned Buddhists from Japan came to the Math to induce the Swami to attend the forthcoming Congress of Religions in Japan. They were Okakura, a famous artist and art critic, and Oda, the Abbot of a Buddhist monastery. The Swami could not accept the invitation on account of his ill health. But he agreed to accompany Okakura to Bodh Gaya. From Gaya he went to Varanasi, where he met the Maharaja of Bhinga who offered him a sum of money to establish a monastery there. The Swami commissioned Swami Shivananda to organise it. At Varanasi, he was delighted to see a few young men who, under the inspiration of his message, had started nursing the

poor and the needy, which work formed the nucleus of the future Ramakrishna Mission Home of Service.

The End

The Swami knew his end was nearing. His body was wearing away day by day, and he was preparing for the final departure. "How often does a man ruin his disciples", he said, "by remaining always with them! When men are once trained, it is essential that their leader leaves them, for without his absence they cannot develop themselves." He refused to express any opinion on the questions of the day. "I can no more enter into outside affairs, I am already on the way" was his reply to those who came to him with problems regarding work. "You may be right, but I cannot enter any more into these matters ; I am going down into death", he told Sister Nivedita when she questioned him on some important matter concerning her educational programme.

Everything about the Swami in the last days was deliberate and significant. A week before the end, he was seen consulting the Bengali almanac. Three days before, on an Ekadashi day, he fed Sister Nivedita with his own hands, though he himself was fasting. At the end of her meal he helped her wash her hands by pouring water for her, and then he dried them with a towel. "It is I who should do these things for you, Swamiji, not you for me", she protested. His reply startled her: "Jesus washed the *feet* of his disciples," he said. The reply, "But that was the *last* time" came to her lips, but remained unuttered. Something checked her. Here also it was the *last* time.

On the last day, Friday, 4th July 1902, he rose very early. Going to the chapel alone, he shut the doors and bolted them, contrary to his habit, and meditated for three hours. He came down the steps of the shrine, singing a beautiful song to the divine Mother Kali. Then he said in a whisper: "If there were another Vivekananda, then he would have understood what this Vivekananda has done. And yet how many Vivekanandas shall be born in time?" Next he asked his disciple, Swami Shuddhananda, to read a passage from the *Shukla Yajur-Veda* with the commentary of Mahidhara on it. He did not agree with Mahidhara and exhorted the disciple to make independent research into the Vedas. He partook of the noon meal with great relish, in company with the members of the Math, unlike on other days when he took his meal alone in his room. Immediately after, he gave lessons to the Brahmacharins on Sanskrit grammar for three hours. In the afternoon, he went out with Swami Premananda and walked nearly two miles, discussing his plan to start a Vedic College in the monastery. When questioned as to its utility, he said: "The study of the Vedas will kill superstition." On his return, he inquired about the welfare of every member of the monastery. Then he conversed for a long time with the members on the rise and fall of nations. "India is immortal", he said, "if she persists in her search for God. But if she goes in for politics and social conflict, she will die." At seven o'clock in the evening, the bell announced the worship in the chapel. The Swami went to his room and told the disciple attending him that no one should come to him until called for. He spent an hour in meditation and telling beads, then called the disciple to open all the windows

and fan his head. He lay down quietly on his bed. The attendant thought that he was either sleeping or meditating. At the end of an hour, his hands trembled a little and he breathed once very heavily. There was silence for a minute or two, and again he breathed in the same manner. He had breathed his last. He had just completed thirty-nine years, five months, and twenty-four days, thus fulfilling a prophecy which was frequently on his lips, "I shall never live to see forty".

SWAMI BRAHMANANDA

One day Shri Ramakrishna saw a vision which threw his whole body into a shiver. He saw that the Divine Mother pointed out to him a boy as being his son. How could he have a son? The very idea was death to him! Then the Divine Mother consoled Her disconsolate child and said that the boy was his spiritual son and not a son in the worldly sense. Shri Ramakrishna breathed a sigh of relief. Afterwards when the same boy came to him as a disciple Ramakrishna at once recognised him to be the one he had seen in his vision. He was later known as Swami Brahmananda.

The early name of Swami Brahmananda was Rakhal Chandra Ghosh. He came of an aristocratic family in Basirhat in the district of twenty-four Parganas. His father Ananda Mohan Ghosh was a zemindar. His mother was a pious lady and a devotee of Shri Krishna. Perhaps it was she who gave her son the name Rakhal (meaning the boy-companion of Shri Krishna) when the latter was born on 21st January 1863. Unfortunately the mother died when Rakhal was only five years old. Soon after, his father married a second wife who brought up Rakhal.

Rakhal grew up a very healthy and fine-looking boy. There was something in his very appearance which endeared him to one and all. His education began in the village school which was started by Ananda Mohan chiefly for the sake of his son. During those days the village schoolmasters were famous for using their rods. Rakhal would feel pained if any of his class-mates had

to undergo corporal punishment. This attracted the notice of the teacher, who afterwards gave up the practice of caning altogether. As a student Rakhal was remarkable for his intelligence. But even as a boy he had varied interests in life. Physically he was much stronger than the average boy of his age. His companions found it hard to cope with him in wrestling or at play. He would take part in many village games and show unsurpassed skill in them. But play and games did not absorb the whole of his attention. Near by was a temple dedicated to the Goddess Kali. Often enough Rakhal would be found in the precincts of the temple. Sometimes he would play at Mother-worship along with his companions. Sometimes he would himself form a beautiful clay image of the Mother and remain absorbed in worship. Even at an early age Rakhal had great devotion to gods and goddesses. During the time of Durga Puja in the family, he would be found seated still and calm witnessing the ceremony, or at the hour of darkness, when the evening service was being performed, Rakhal would be seen standing before the Deity in great devotion.

Rakhal, from his boyhood, had instinctive love for devotional music. When begging friars sang songs in praise of Krishna the Flute-player of Vrindaban, or when anyone sang songs about the Divine Mother, he would become lost to himself. Sometimes he would repair with his companions to a secluded spot in the midst of the field close to the village, and they would sing devotional songs in chorus. In the course of singing, he would occasionally lose almost all outward consciousness, his mind soaring up to a higher region.

After he had finished the primary education, Rakhal

was sent to Calcutta in 1875 and admitted into an English High School. In Calcutta he came in contact with Narendra Nath, afterwards known as Swami Vivekananda, who was then leader of the boys of the locality. Narendra, with his dynamic spirit and born leadership, cast his influence over others and carried them along the path he thought right. Rakhal, meek, quiet and soft-natured as he was, easily came under his spell, and there grew a close friendship between the two which culminated in a common discipleship at Dakshineswar and bore far-reaching results.

Rakhal and Narendra practised physical exercise in a common gymnasium along with their other companions. And it was Narendra who took Rakhal to the Brahmo Samaj, where they promised not to worship any image. Rakhal's inborn religious tendencies began to unfold themselves more definitely at this stage. He would be found brooding over the mysteries of life and death, and his mind longed for the realisation of the Eternal Verity. He was intelligent and sharp, but he now lost all interest in his school work. His guardians became alarmed at his indifference to studies. At first they tried to change his attitude through loving persuasion. When that failed, they became stern and strict. But as all measures proved abortive, Rakhal's father got him married, thinking that thereby his interest would turn towards worldly things. Such, however, was the irony of fate that this marriage itself brought Rakhal into contact with the one who afterwards changed the whole course of his life.

Rakhal married the sister of one Manomohan Mitra of Konnagar, an important village up the Ganga on the right bank, a few miles from Dakshineswar. Both

Manomohan and his mother were great devotees of Shri Ramakrishna. After this marriage, Manomohan one day, in the middle of 1881, took him to Dakshineswar to meet the Master. When Rakhal bowed before the Master, the vision the latter had seen came before his mind, and he was swept by a wave of joy, but he did not give vent to his feelings except by the fact that he treated Rakhal with utmost kindness. Rakhal was charmed with the wonderful love of the Master and thought that he had never received such affection from anybody before. Naturally, the thought of the Master haunted his mind even after he had returned home. As a result, some time afterwards, Rakhal one day went to Dakshineswar alone. The Master was in ecstasy at the sight of Rakhal, and the latter stood dumbfounded.

Rakhal now frequented Dakshineswar as often as he could. He began also sometimes to stay there. Though a young man of eighteen or nineteen, in the presence of the Master he felt like a child of four or five, and he actually behaved that way. In the Master, Rakhal found the deep affection of his long-lost mother and the tender care of his father, only in a degree infinitely more intense. The Master also treated him exactly as his child. He would feel concerned for him as for a helpless infant. Whereas other disciples attended to the comforts of the Master, the latter himself would often take care of Rakhal. And there was such a spontaneity and naturalness in this strange relationship between the two, that a bystander would rather enjoy it than feel astonished at it. Whereas other disciples would consider it a great favour and privilege if they were allowed to do the least service for the Master, Rakhal would sometimes refuse point-blank to perform

work which he was called upon to do by the Master. Instead of being annoyed, Shri Ramakrishna was rather amused at such behaviour; for it indicated the intimacy which had developed between them. But Rakhal would usually be eager to attend to all the comforts of the Master. He was more than a personal attendant to him. A son does not serve his father with so much loving devotion as Rakhal served the Master. And in addition to such services, he would carefully guard the body of the Master when the latter's mind was lost in Samadhi. At times, when the Master would walk about in his ecstatic moods, Rakhal would guide his footsteps by holding his body and giving loud directions about the things to be guarded against.

When Rakhal's visit to Dakshineswar became frequent, and sometimes he began to stay there to the detriment of his studies, his father was annoyed and afterwards alarmed. He tried his best to persuade Rakhal to be mindful of his future worldly career, but it was impossible for Rakhal to think of his future in terms of material happiness. Persuasion having failed, Ananda Mohan kept Rakhal under surveillance, but Rakhal managed to escape and run to Dakshineswar. When all measures failed, Ananda Mohan gave up the case of Rakhal as hopeless. Rakhal now felt relieved that he could stay with the Master without any interference from home.

Rakhal received from the Master not only the tender affection of a parent, but also the guidance of a spiritual Guru. It was the unsurpassed love of the Master which at first drew Rakhal to him, but the latter soon found that behind that human affection there was a spiritual power which could transform lives by a mere

wish or thought. Through the Master's incomparable love, Rakhal began to undergo a great spiritual transformation.

The Master was very keen in regard to the spiritual training of his beloved son. If need be, he did not hesitate to scold Rakhal for the least failing noticed in him. One day when Rakhal came before the Master, the latter asked him why there was a shadow of darkness over his face. Was it the result of any wrong he had committed? Rakhal gaped in wonder. He could not remember to have done anything wrong. But after long cogitation he recollected that he had told a fib in fun. Then the Master cautioned him not to tell a lie even in joke.

One day the Master with Rakhal went on invitation to attend a religious festival. But the organisers of the festival were busy with rich and influential people and showed scant courtesy to the Master. This was certainly more than young Rakhal could bear. Like a petulant boy he asked the Master to leave the place at once. But the Master would not listen to his counsel, and put up with any amount of indignity. Afterwards he told Rakhal that if they had left the place in resentment that would have caused harm to the master of the house. Rakhal saw the depth of meaning even behind the trifling acts of the Master, and himself got a lesson in humility and self-effacement.

Sometimes in a spiritual mood Shri Ramakrishna would quite unexpectedly bestow the highest gifts on his chosen disciples. Once Rakhal was in meditation in front of the Kali temple when the Master arrived on the spot. Finding him seated in meditation, the Master accosted him and said, "This is your sacred Word and

this is your Chosen Ideal." Rakhal looked up and was vouchsafed the vision of his Chosen Deity. He was beside himself with joy at this unexpected stroke of favour.

As he continued his stay with the Master at Dakshineswar Rakhal's spiritual life began to progress rapidly. There were many occasions when he would be so much absorbed in meditation that he would lose all consciousness of the sense-world, and the Master had to come to his aid to bring his thought down to the plane of ordinary consciousness. The Master was so much pleased with the spiritual progress Rakhal was making that he would sometimes publicly praise him. In those days Rakhal would be constantly in communion with God. He would day and night repeat the Holy Name, and his moving lips would betray what was going on inside. The very sight of this would now and then throw the Master into ecstasy. Out of the fullness of joy at having such a worthy disciple Shri Ramakrishna began to teach Rakhal the intricacies of Yoga and various forms of spiritual practice. But Rakhal hated any publicity in these things. He would undertake his spiritual practices as secretly as possible. But his appearance, modes of thought and conduct, and, above all, the radiating sweetness of his nature would indicate the inner transformation he was undergoing.

Spiritual life is not, however, all smooth-sailing. There are ups and downs even there. Rakhal also had to pass through difficulties. One day Rakhal sat for meditation in the music hall of the Kali temple, but however much he tried, his mind wandered about till he got exasperated. He was filled with remorse and self-disparagement. He had received the blessings of a

saint like the Master and everything in the atmosphere was favourable to spiritual progress, and yet such was the condition of his mind! Perhaps he was not fit for spiritual life. Such stormy thoughts assailed him, and in sheer disgust and agony he left the seat of meditation. By a strange coincidence Shri Ramakrishna was just then passing that way. Looking at Rakhal he inquired why he got up from his seat after such a short time. Rakhal in all frankness narrated what was passing through his mind. The Master looked grave and pensive for a while and then asked Rakhal to open his mouth. While muttering some indistinct words, the Master wrote something on his tongue. It had the instantaneous effect of unloading the burden of Rakhal's mind. He felt relieved, and an inner current of joy flowed through his mind. The Master smiled and asked him to try to meditate again.

Rakhal was having a blissful time with the Master at Dakshineswar. But trouble came. He began to have repeated attacks of fever, which made the Master very anxious. At that time the great devotee Balaram Bose was about to go to Vrindaban. With him Rakhal was also sent for a change of climate. There again Rakhal fell ill. That made the Master all the more anxious, for he had known in a vision that Rakhal was a companion of Shri Krishna in a previous incarnation, so that he was apprehensive of Rakhal's giving up his body if the recollection of the past came to his mind. Hence he prayed piteously to the Divine Mother for his spiritual son, and was not relieved till he got an assurance from Her. After three months Rakhal returned to Dakshineswar much improved in health, and the Master was glad beyond measure to receive him.

The number of devotees and young disciples who were attracted by the personality of the Master was steadily on the increase. Some of the young disciples were Rakhal's old friends and acquaintances ; so he was happy to have a tie of common discipleship with them. But they were not to enjoy the holy company of the Master long. For he fell ill of throat trouble which developed into cancer. He was removed to Shyampukur, Calcutta, and then to Cossipore for facilities of better treatment. Under the leadership of Narendra Nath, Rakhal and others threw themselves heart and soul into the work of nursing the Master. These were days of service to the Guru as well as of strenuous spiritual discipline. Rakhal was by nature introspective, but now he grew more and more serious and indrawn. One day the Master said, "Rakhal has the wisdom and capacity to administer a vast kingdom." Narendra understood what it meant. The young disciples held Rakhal in great esteem, because he was so much loved and admired by the Master. One day Narendra suggested to his brother-disciples, "Henceforward let us address Rakhal as 'Raja' (meaning king)." Everyone gave a spontaneous assent to the proposal. When the news reached the ears of the Master, he was glad and remarked, "Indeed it is an appropriate name for Rakhal."

The disciples were hoping against hope that the Master would recover. But his health was gradually turning from bad to worse. One day Rakhal in agony asked the Master to pray to the Divine Mother for recovery. But it was impossible for the Master to pray for any particular thing against the will of God, much less for his health. He simply replied, "That rests with

God." Yes, God's will prevailed against all human efforts. In spite of the best medical care and treatment, the Master began to sink and passed away on August 16, 1886.

After the passing of the Master, Rakhal joined the monastery at Baranagore along with the other young disciples. Subsequently they took Sannyasa ceremonially and changed their family names. Thus Rakhal became Swami Brahmananda. But his brother-disciples preferred to address him as "Raja", as a mark of deep love and respect, and in subsequent years, he was known in the order as Raja Maharaj or simply Maharaj.

If the period of stay in the company of the Master was one of supreme bliss, the days at Baranagore were of hard Tapasya. The young disciples were ready to lay down their lives, as it were, in search of the great Unknown. They did not care about physical comforts, they did not care about food and drink; the one supreme thought of their lives was how to realise the Self or rather how to make the realisations they had in the presence of the Master a permanent factor in their lives.

After some time even the life at Baranagore seemed to them too secure for their spiritual growth. They wanted to be lost in the wide unknown world with no help and guide excepting God. Some of them began to go to places of pilgrimage to practise Tapasya in seclusion. Maharaj (Swami Brahmananda), spurred by such a spirit of renunciation, went to Puri. He stayed there for some time begging his food here and there and passing his days in the thought of the Lord. The devotees and disciples of the Master could never bear the idea that Maharaj should suffer any hardship, for was he not the special care of the Master? So when

Balaram Bose, who had a big estate in Orissa and a rich establishment at Puri, heard that Maharaj was undergoing great austerities, he began to press the latter to stay with him in more comfort. Maharaj, finding thus that at Puri he could not follow his own way of life, returned to Baranagore. But he was seized with intense longing to make harder efforts to realise the goal of life. He expressed his desire to go to North India and to practise Tapasya somewhere there. The leader, Narendra Nath, reluctantly agreed to allow his beloved brother-disciple to embrace the wandering life. But he directed another brother-disciple, Swami Subodhananda, to accompany him, so that "Raja" would not have to suffer much inconvenience. Swami Brahmananda went to Varanasi via Deoghar and stayed there for some time. From Varanasi he went to Omkarnath on the bank of the Narmada. It is said that while practising Tapasya on the bank of that holy river, he was once, for six days at a stretch, in an ecstatic mood, almost oblivious of the outward world. After Omkarnath he with his brother-disciple and a devotee visited other places of pilgrimage like Panchavati, holy with the association of Ramachandra and Sita, Dwaraka, where there is the famous temple of Shri Krishna, Porbandar, Girnar, Ajmer, etc., and afterwards returned to Vrindaban. For a soul like Swami Brahmananda, visiting these holy places did not simply mean the satisfaction of the idle curiosity of a sight-seer, but at every place he would identify himself with the deeper spirit of the environment. As a result he was constantly absorbed within himself, and though his lips were closed, his face indicated the spiritual fire within. Many were the persons who were attracted to him merely by his

placid countenance and indrawn look. They would feel it a privilege to be of some service to him, and pressed Maharaj to receive it, but one whose mind was soaring high was altogether indifferent to any material comfort. It was difficult, if not impossible to persuade Maharaj to accept any gift. If extremely pressed, Maharaj would agree to accept something, but that would be so little and of such a trifling nature that it would cause more astonishment than pleasure to the giver.

It was for the second time that the Swami came to Vrindaban. Here he passed the days in severe spiritual practices. He was burning with a desire to reach the ultimate goal of life, and in the attempt to realise this desire any price was not too great for him to pay. Throughout the day he would be engaged in one or another form of spiritual practice. Swami Subodhananda was there with him. But they hardly talked. Swami Subodhananda would fetch food for him ; but sometimes he would eat it and sometimes be oblivious of it. The great saint Vijay Krishna Goswami, who had seen Rakhal at Dakshineswar and knew how he had been loved by Shri Ramakrishna, was at this time staying at Vrindaban. When he saw the severe austerities Maharaj was undergoing, he asked him: "What necessity have you for so much austerity? Has not the Master given you all that is covetable in spiritual life?" To this Maharaj simply smiled and replied, "What I got from him I want to make a permanent possession." After some time Swami Subodhananda left for a pilgrimage to Hardwar, and Maharaj lived alone. This gave him greater freedom of life and an opportunity to practise harder Tapasya.

At Vrindaban he heard the news that the great devotee Balaram Bose had died. This upset him so much that he left Vrindaban and went to the Himalayan region at Hardwar for greater solitude. He stayed at Kankhal near Hardwar for a period. Afterwards he would say that the atmosphere of Kankhal was very favourable for spiritual growth. While he was living there, Swamiji (Vivekananda), with Turiyananda, Saradananda, and Vaikuntha Sanyal unexpectedly came from Almora to meet him. The joy of such a meeting can be better imagined than described. Swami Vivekananda feared that perhaps Swami Brahmananda would impair his health by hard Tapasya and living alone; so he compelled him to accompany him on his way to Meerut. After some time, when Swamiji left his brother-disciples in order to wander alone, Swami Brahmananda, accompanied by Swami Turiyananda, started on a pilgrimage to Jwalamukhi and from there he visited various other sacred places in the Punjab, Sind, Bombay, and Rajputana. At Bombay they met Swamiji who was then preparing to sail for America to attend the Parliament of Religions at Chicago. With the Swami they travelled up to Abu Road Station, from where they returned to Vrindaban. Here both of them gave their time entirely to spiritual practices, Swami Turiyananda also taking care of Maharaj. They had a very enviable time at Vrindaban, both of them being absorbed day and night in communion with God. Afterwards they would very delightfully recount many happy incidents of their lives there.

While the two brother-disciples were enjoying spiritual bliss in the holy atmosphere of Vrindaban, the news reached them that a tremendous success had attended

the mission of Swamiji in America. They were very glad to see that the prophetic utterances of the Master with respect to their leader had come true. Swamiji was constantly writing to his Gurubhais to plunge themselves into work for the regeneration of India as well as for the welfare of humanity. Repeated requests began to come from Swamiji, as also from the monastery which had now been removed to Alambazar from Baranagore, asking the two brothers at Vrindaban to return to Bengal, so that all might organise themselves together into a band for future work. At first Swami Turiyananda returned, and he was followed also by Maharaj at the end of 1894.

The arrival of the "Raja" at the Math created a great stir and enthusiasm. Everybody was so glad to have the privilege of his company. His very presence had an uplifting influence on the atmosphere. Maharaj also was glad to see that the message of the Master made such a tremendous appeal to the world. Knowing the Master as he did, he was not surprised at that, but he wanted to make the Math a more powerful vehicle for the spread of that message. Once he said to his Gurubhais: "Your life, your Math will be the source of solace, hope, and inspiration to all who are weary and heavy-laden. Just build up your life accordingly." When Swami Vivekananda heard in America that "Raja" had returned to the Math, he was highly delighted. For he had always a great regard for the judgement and opinion of Swami Brahmananda. And had not the Master said that Rakhal possessed the capability to rule a kingdom? Swami Vivekananda fell upon the world like an avalanche. He moved like a whirlwind from one end of the world to the other to impart

his message. He was too busy and dynamic. He had no time, as he said, to give his message a finish. He had some big plans in his hand, which required sustained effort for fruition. But he knew that his life was short. Hence after launching some of his schemes very successfully, he needed somebody to carry them out faithfully. So far as the Ramakrishna brotherhood was concerned, Maharaj, with his infinite calm and patience, extraordinary common sense and wisdom, and faithfulness to the leader, was the very man to make that message fruitful in the soil of India. Swamiji came upon the world as a thundering voice. Maharaj's life was like the gentle dew that falls unknown and unperceived but brings in the rich autumnal harvest.

Two years after Maharaj had returned to the Math, Swami Vivekananda also had returned to India. When the great Swamiji met Maharaj, he handed over to the latter all the money he had collected for the Indian work, and said: "Now I am relieved. I have handed over the sacred trust to the right person." Maharaj was the "friend, philosopher, and guide" of Swamiji in everything concerning the management of the monastery and the philanthropic works of the Mission. He gave advice about his plans, and followed his ideas in action. He also took care of his health. When the Ramakrishna Mission Society was started, Swamiji became the general President and Maharaj was made the President of the Calcutta centre. But in the beginning of 1902 Swamiji relinquished his position. Swami Brahmananda was then elected to that place and he worked as the President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission till his last day.

The relation between Swamiji and Maharaj was

wonderful, and very enjoyable to anyone who witnessed it. Both were beloved of the Master. Both were termed by the Master as Nityasiddhas and Ishvarakotis, that is souls who are eternally free and belong to the divine class but come down to earth for the good and guidance of humanity. Both knew each other intimately from their school days, and their lifelong relationship only increased their love and respect for each other. When Swamiji returned from America, he bowed down to Maharaj saying, "The son of the Guru is to be respected as much as the Guru himself." Maharaj too did not lag behind in his sense of humour. He returned the compliment saying, "To the elder brother is due the respect that is given to a father." To impress on others' minds the spiritual eminence of Swami Vivekananda, Maharaj said: "Where else would you find a holy man like Naren?" He also remarked that when one sat in meditation with Swamiji, one's mind naturally became meditative, to which he himself would bear witness.

With this spiritual background the human relationship between the two was very interesting. Sometimes with his practical common sense and intimate knowledge of local affairs Maharaj had to modify plans given by Swamiji. At that the latter would at times become angry and upset. But afterwards when he understood his own mistake, he repented in such a way that the supposedly aggrieved party felt embarrassed, and regretted the suffering caused to Swamiji. Swami Vivekananda was fond of animals; Swami Brahmananda was a lover of gardens. When the animals of one would damage the garden of the other, there would ensue a quarrel the seriousness of which would cause side-splitting laughter to the bystanders.

Swamiji had infinite faith in the loyalty of Maharaj to his cause. He would say: "Others may desert me. But Raja will stand by me till the last." The two giants put their shoulders together to further the cause of the work started in the name of the Master. The new monastery at Belur was established in 1899. A permanent centre was started in Madras, another was opened in the retreat of the Himalayas. Others in India were growing. The Vedanta centres in New York and San Francisco came into existence in 1894 and 1900 respectively. The work was progressing apace. But the two Swamis could not work together long. The life of Swami Vivekananda was prematurely cut short in the year 1902.

The passing away of the leader was a great blow to the work he had started. And it was a great shock to his Gurubhais, specially to Maharaj on whom the whole responsibility now fell and who was looked up to for guidance by the whole institution. But suppressing the feeling of personal bereavement at the passing away of Swamiji, he turned his attention to the discharge of the duties that devolved on him.

Maharaj's method of work was wonderful. Though his responsibility was too great for any ordinary mortal, his calmness was never disturbed, the serenity of his mind was never ruffled. About the secret of work he once said: "Give the whole of your mind to God. If there is no wastage of mental energy, with a fraction of your mind you can do so much work that the world will be dazed." The truth of this was exemplified in the life of the Swami himself. Who could have believed on seeing him that he was bearing such a heavy burden? Rather it seemed as if he was indifferent with regard

to the affairs of the organisation and that his whole mind was given to God. It was as if only by an effort that he could bring his mind down to mundane things. His far away look, his half-closed eyes, deeply calm composure indicated that his thoughts did not belong to this plane of existence. Yet he was sure of the progress of the work for he relied more on the spiritual attainments and character of the members of the organisation than on the outer circumstances, though he never neglected the latter. He had intimate knowledge of the minds of the different members working even in distant centres. He could read characters at a glance and guide them accordingly. Every member of the vast organisation felt that his interest was safe in the hands of the Swami. His gentle wish was more than a command to all the workers.

The interests of the Swami were varied. He could give wise direction for the design of a building, he could formulate plans for relief works, his suggestions on the methods of education were valued by educationists, his advice regarding the principles to be followed in editing books was at once found to be extremely sound, and in every Ashrama, he visited or stayed in, he encouraged people to have flower and kitchen gardens. His love of flowers was great. To his spiritual vision, the flowers that bloomed in the gardens were the offerings of Nature to the All-pervading Deity. Anyone plucking a flower or injuring a flower plant would incur the greatest displeasure of Maharaj. He would see that the accounts of public money were kept with the strictest regularity. He would not tolerate the slightest carelessness in this respect.

In spite of all these interests, one could vividly see

in him that here was a mind which could not be brought down to the level of ordinary work. It was very difficult to persuade Maharaj to attend the meetings of the Trustees of the Math or of the Governing Body of the Mission. He had a happy knack of feeling "slightly indisposed" on such occasions or of giving suggestions that the meeting might be postponed. Those who were responsible for convening such meetings had a hard time with Maharaj in this respect. They felt that they were trying to bring within the constitution of the law a soul which eternally soared above all laws. They felt greatly pained at the thought of what a great torture it meant to the Swami. But once he could be brought to the meeting his opinions and suggestions were invaluable. Experiences showed that his counsels were so very correct that nobody, even in the course of the debate, later on, would feel inclined to dispute what he had said. And there was hardly any debate at such meetings. What the Swami would say or even remotely suggest would invariably be accepted by all. Swami Saradananda, who was the Secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission, once said to a young worker, "When I say a thing, you should judge and discriminate whether I am right or wrong, but when Maharaj says a thing you may safely accept that as true without the slightest doubt."

Swami Brahmananda could count on such implicit allegiance just because he kept the Master's spiritual ideal above all other considerations. Two illustrations will suffice. A rich man of Calcutta, who had lost his only son, came to live at Belur to be near the monks for whose philanthropic work he had great respect. After a few days, he proposed to donate all his property

to the Ramakrishna Mission for charitable purposes. When this was communicated to Maharaj by Swami Premananda, Maharaj said: "How strange it is, my brother, that this man should imbibe our renunciation by living in our company, and we should get his worldliness from him!" Swami Premananda understood and felt ashamed, so that the matter was dropped. Maharaj knew that the man's renunciation was temporary, brought on as it was by his grief, and as such, monks were not to take advantage of this.

The other incident related to the movement for national liberation. Some young men, connected with the revolutionary movement, for this purpose, approached Maharaj for his opinion. For ordinary people this might be a very embarrassing situation. As Indians, all wanted liberation, so that, even if they avoided encouraging a revolutionary movement in public, for fear of the police, they talked eulogistically of this in private, as otherwise they would be branded as anti-national. Maharaj also might have taken the help of such a subterfuge ; but instead of doing so, he told the revolutionary young men, even in that private interview that, according to him, the way for progress chalked out by the Master and Swamiji was the only true one, for without a strong moral and spiritual basis, no movement could succeed.

Swami Brahmananda made several tours in North and South India. By the inspiration of his presence existing centres received a fresh impetus and new centres began to spring up. Wherever he went there came a crowd of visitors—young and old—to see him. They were invariably so much impressed by his love, kindness, and the force of his personality, that

they became lifelong friends and supporters of the Mission.

In his talks with the monks of the different centres, one of the problems that repeatedly cropped up was with regard to the adjustment between work and meditation. He knew that humanitarian work, without any spiritual inspiration behind it, leads to egotism and becomes a danger to one's religious life. At the same time there is the other danger of gliding back into indolence in the name of meditation. Maharaj's aim was to strike a balance without undermining the primacy of spirituality. He had to raise humanitarian work to a spiritual level. "We have to work so hard that we do not get sufficient time for meditation", said a disciple expecting to get the sympathy of one whose whole mind was given to God. "You should feel ashamed to say that, my child!" replied Maharaj, "You are monks, you ought not to complain of hard work. It is not the quantity of work but the vagaries of the mind that create obstacles in the way of meditation." "Just sacrifice this one life for the sake of the work of Swamiji (Swami Vivekananda), even if you consider it a loss. Have you not lived countless lives before? But if you give yourself up whole-heartedly to his cause, rest assured, through his grace, your spiritual life will progress with the speed of a rocket." "Don't be ungrateful to Swamiji," he said to some young men on another occasion, "he worked himself to death for you and the country. Just plunge yourselves into his work and repay the debt due to him."

When he visited any centre, he would not go so much into the details of the work as he would be interested in giving the members a spiritual uplift. According

to him, one cannot do really unselfish work unless one's whole mind is given to God. He would say to the monks, "Fie on you, if after giving up the world, cutting yourself from the love of your parents and relatives, you cannot devote the whole of your energy to the realisation of God." He would exhort one and all to make the realisation of God the one and only aim of their lives. He would say: "Create dissatisfaction in your mind even by an effort. Ask yourself whether you are devoting the whole of your energy to your spiritual welfare. Ask yourself at night how much of the time has been spent in communion with God and how much in other things. The time that has not been given to God has been spent in vain, has been wasted." Yet, strange to say, though he laid the main emphasis on spiritual growth, the work of the Mission steadily grew under his care, for it was the spirituality in practice that the Mission really stood for.

Maharaj knew that ordinary mortals had not the aptitude either to carry on or appreciate a long spiritual talk. So he came to the level of ordinary conversation, through which he revealed and imparted higher spiritual truth and knowledge. It was very difficult to draw him into purely spiritual conversations. But when he did talk, his words scintillated with fire, and those who heard him got a lifelong inspiration. As a result of his influence many young men joined the Order. Sometimes a doubting mind found its scepticism vanish by merely coming into his presence. One could rarely argue with him, nor was he given to theoretical discussion. His presence was enough to solve many complex problems which had troubled people for many, many weary years. Innumerable persons had such

experiences. Those who had known both Shri Ramakrishna and Swami Brahmananda used to say that Maharaj represented some of the characteristics of the Master; there was some similarity even in physical appearance.

Wherever he would go there would be so much joyous festivity that all found themselves immersed in it. But there was this characteristic about it, that it was highly uplifting. Once there was so much disaffection amongst the members in a certain centre that the whole atmosphere was vitiated. When all other remedies failed, Maharaj was approached and persuaded to visit the centre. When he went to the place, he did not at all inquire into the grievances of the individual members. Yet his presence created such a great wave of spiritual enthusiasm, that all petty problems were automatically solved.

After the passing away of Swami Vivekananda, the first thing that Maharaj gave his attention to was the consolidation of the work at the headquarters. After about one year, when he had put the day-to-day work of the organisation in the hands of Swami Saradananda and the management of the Belur Math in charge of another Gurubhai, Maharaj left for Varanasi. In Varanasi at that time there was a centre of the Ramakrishna Math, called Advaita Ashrama, meant exclusively for meditative life, and there was also a philanthropic institution started by some young men under the inspiration of Swami Vivekananda. When Swami Brahmananda reached Varanasi, the committee of the latter institution formally handed over the management to the Ramakrishna Mission. Maharaj stayed at Varanasi for about a month. Some years later, on another visit,

he laid the foundation-stone of the Ramakrishna Mission Home of Service on a new plot of land. Some of the buildings that have been constructed there were according to his plan and design.

From Varanasi he went to Kankhal, near Hardwar, where Swami Kalyanananda, a young disciple of the Order, had started medical work for the sick and the needy. In the quiet of the holy atmosphere at Kankhal, Maharaj remained day and night absorbed in divine communion. Here as elsewhere his silent presence gave impetus to the work of the institution and the Ashrama began to improve after he had been there. From Hardwar he went to Vrindaban where Swami Turiyananda was practising Tapasya. Arriving at Vrindaban, Swami Brahmananda again felt an urge to devote himself exclusively to Tapasya. He stayed there for a period along with Swami Turiyananda, spending his time in hard spiritual practices. He would at that time get up regularly at midnight for meditation. It is said that one night he was fast asleep and the time to get up was almost over when he suddenly felt a push. He woke up, to find a good spirit beckoning and reminding him to meditate.

From Vrindaban, Maharaj went to Allahabad, where Swami Vijnanananda, a brother-disciple of his was staying and building up the nucleus of the future Ramakrishna centre. He next went to Vindhyachal, a sacred place of pilgrimage associated with the memory of the Divine Mother. At this place he was in a highly ecstatic mood. At the temple of the Divine Mother one night he asked an attendant to sing some song. As Maharaj stood before the Divine Presence listening to the song, tears flowed down his cheeks, and soon he was so much

absorbed in communion that he lost all outward consciousness, and the bystanders had to take care of him. He had a similar experience in another temple at Vindhyachal. After staying at this holy place for a few days, he returned to the monastery at Belur.

In the month of June, 1906, he went to Puri. Of all the holy places he liked Varanasi, Vrindaban, Puri, and Hardwar most. When at Varanasi, he would be full of the thoughts of Vishwanath and Annapurna, the presiding deities; at Vrindaban the association of Shri Krishna would throw his mind into ecstasy; at Puri his emotion would be stirred by the remembrance of Chaitanya and Jagannath, whereas at Hardwar his mind would be absorbed in contemplation of the all-pervading Presence. At different places he would be in different moods—every one as inspiring as another.

In October, 1908, at the earnest request of Swami Ramakrishnananda, head of the Ramakrishna Math at Madras, Swami Brahmananda started for South India. With his wonderful devotion Swami Ramakrishnananda considered Maharaj as a veritable representative of the Master on earth. So when Maharaj arrived at Madras, Swami Ramakrishnananda told the innumerable devotees who came to see the new Swami, "You have not seen the Master. Just make your life blessed by seeing his beloved son." The childlike simplicity and very unassuming nature of Maharaj, hiding within an extraordinary spiritual personality, made a wonderful impression wherever he went. If anybody approached him with a question, he now and then said with his inborn humility: "Just go to Shashi (Swami Ramakrishnananda). He is a great scholar. He will answer your question." But if the inquirer persisted and

could persuade the Swami to speak, his words removed a heavy load from the mind of the aspirant.

In those days the gulf of separation in the social lives of Brahmins and non-Brahmins was much greater in Southern India. During Maharaj's stay at Madras Math, a non-Brahmin devotee invited him to his house. He accepted the invitation readily. And to the house of that devotee, along with Maharaj went Brahmins, non-Brahmins, Christians, Brahmos, all of whom took their meal together. There was no fuss about social reform in this inter-dining. It was inspired by a spontaneous feeling of brotherhood that arose in the presence of a saint.

From Madras City he went on a pilgrimage to Rameshwaram and Madura. As he entered the temple of Minakshi at Madura, he began to utter the name of the Mother like a child, and he lost soon all outward consciousness. Swami Ramakrishnananda, who accompanied him, immediately took hold of the Swami lest he should fall down. It was nearly an hour after when he came down to the normal consciousness. Maharaj usually had great control over his religious emotion. Rarely could a person detect what was going on within him. His spiritual experiences, of which he had a great many as circumstantial evidences indicate, are a sealed book to the outside world. But at times a flood-tide of feeling would break down all barriers of control even in such a powerful personality, and the bystanders could then be blessed by seeing the outward signs of his spiritual experience. From Madura he returned to Madras and from there went to Bangalore to open the new building of the monastery there.

It was in July 1916, that Maharaj went to visit the

South for the second time. On 4th August, he laid the foundation-stone of the new building of the Ramakrishna Math at Madras and after a week went to Bangalore. At the monastery at Bangalore many untouchables would meet in the main hall for prayer and worship. Maharaj was specially pleased at this sight. One day, of his own accord, he suddenly visited the quarters of the untouchables, saw the shrine-room they had built, and encouraged and blessed them. It was beyond the farthest limit of their imagination that such a great saint, whose presence had created a stir amongst the elite of the town and to see whom even the big people of the place were very eager, could feel so interested in them as to go to their place unasked and mix with them so freely.

This time Maharaj visited many sacred places in the South including some notable temples in Travancore. During this visit he laid the foundation-stone of an Ashrama on a beautiful spot on the top of a hill in Trivandrum overlooking the sea. And on 6th May 1917, he laid the foundation-stone of the new building of the Ramakrishna Mission Students' Home in Madras and soon after left for Bengal. His last visit to the South was in 1920, when he opened the new spacious building of the Ramakrishna Mission Students' Home in Madras.

In the meantime, in 1916, he went to Dacca in East Bengal to lay the foundation-stone of the local Ramakrishna Mission on a new site. He took advantage of this occasion to visit the holy shrine at Kamakhya in Assam. Then he went to Mymensingh and visited Narayangunge as also Deobhog, the birthplace of Durga Charan Nag, a great devotee of the Master.

It has been mentioned that he went to North India several times. He would usually stay at Varanasi or Kankhal and visit other sacred places occasionally. Whenever he visited a sacred place or a temple, a large number of monks and devotees would accompany him, for to go with him was to get an added inspiration. On such occasions he would often take with him some musicians whom he would ask to sing devotional songs in the presence of the Deity. The combined effect of all these was simply marvellous. Those who were present on such occasions would be lifted up to a plane beyond the reach of any earthliness. And the one who was the centre of all this would remain absorbed within himself also oblivious of his surroundings. Once while he was hearing devotional music in Ayodhya standing in front of the Deity, there came a downpour. Still he stood steadfast almost unconscious of the rains. Others came hurriedly and took care of him. It was long after the rains had ceased that the Swami came back to the conscious plane.

He had a great love for music. Latterly it became a rule to arrange for good devotional music, vocal or instrumental, at evening wherever he happened to be. During such performances, he would sit quiet in the midst and his very serenity would create such an atmosphere that nobody would dare whisper a word lest there should be disturbance. Such occasions brought to the listeners the blessings of a spiritual bath, as it were.

With respect to Swami Brahmananda, Shri Ramakrishna used to say in his inimitable homely way, "Rakhal is like a mango which does not give any outward indication when ripe." He meant that Rakhal had

within him great spiritual potentiality which he would keep hidden from the outside world. But in spite of all his attempts to keep his powers hidden, people in larger and larger numbers began to flock to him when his spiritual personality began to unfold itself. And they were of all classes—actors and dramatists, lawyers and doctors, old and young men. They all wondered what was in him that attracted them so much. They always failed in their analytical estimation of his personality; but the total spiritual effect was so irresistible that they could not help going to him. He would not necessarily talk of spiritual things with them. As a matter of fact, he was very taciturn in that respect. He would talk of all sorts of things, but if any spiritual question was put to him, he would look grave, and the questioner would not like to press his point. But still there were many who would feel miserable if they had not seen him at least once in the course of the day.

Perhaps one of the secrets of this magnetic attraction was his deep love for one and all, though there was hardly any sentimental expression of his love. He would say, "The love that expresses itself outwardly is not sufficiently deep." Behind his silence people could not gauge how deep was his concern for them. They would feel drawn by a strong current, as it were, but they could not understand the why and wherefore of it. Innumerable were the lives that were changed by his touch. Many would come, with whom he would crack jokes and make fun, but afterwards they would find to their great astonishment that their lives had taken a new turn. There were persons who thought no sacrifice too great to fulfil his slightest wish. Many young men, caught in the current of his love, gave up

the world and worldly prospects. They felt that in comparison with the love they got from him, the love of their parents dwindled into nothingness.

In the earlier years it was very difficult to get initiation from him. He was very searching about the aspirants, and the standard he demanded was an extremely high one. But latterly he was more liberal in this respect. The method of his giving initiation was novel. Once he said that in giving initiation he had to find out through deep meditation the exact Mantra and the Chosen Deity of the disciple. Until he could get that, he would not give initiation. He was conscious of the fact that to make a disciple is to take upon oneself the spiritual responsibility of the person concerned. And until the disciple gets his salvation, the Guru willingly forgoes his own desire for that. Naturally, he was careful to give initiation to only those who were really earnest about their spiritual life.

His human relationship was wonderful. We have seen how everybody felt the touch of his infinite love. His courtesy and dignity were remarkable and revealed more a prince than a monk. He had actually the majestic appearance of a prince. If nothing else, his mere appearance compelled reverence from others.

He had also his moments of fun or play with children, when he identified himself so completely with them that one would hardly take him to be Swami Brahmananda, the head of the Ramakrishna Order, before whom the monks bowed and big men felt themselves humble. His fund of humour was great, and no less was his capacity for mischief-making. One of his Gurubhais, Swami Akhandananda, wanted to take leave of him to

go to his field of work. Maharaj reluctantly agreed to the proposal. A palanquin was engaged which would carry the Gurubhai to the railway station for the night train. Before the palanquin started Maharaj whispered something to the bearers. The bearers, instead of going to the station, walked throughout the whole night to the tune of their droning sound of "hoom, hoom" and returned with the inattentive Gurubhai at sunrise to the place from which they had started. Maharaj came out and greeted his brother there gravely. The Gurubhai realised the mischief. The condition of his mind can well be imagined ; but he did not know whether to get angry or to admire the cleverness of his brother. It was difficult to cope with Maharaj in such matters.

The last important act of Maharaj was to build under his personal supervision an Ashrama at Bhubaneshwar, in Orissa. He was of the opinion that Bhubaneshwar had such a congenial atmosphere that progress would be very rapid if one undertook spiritual practice there. He saw that many monks of the Order had to work so hard that they did not find sufficient time for Tapasya. And those who went to Rishikesh and other places for this broke down in health by too much hardship. He desired very much that there should be a place where the monks could get proper facilities for spiritual practices. He had an idea of personally carrying out the development of the place according to this plan; but he was not able to see his dream fulfilled.

After his last Madras tour he returned to Bengal, stopping on the way for some time at Bhubaneshwar. While at the headquarters, he sometimes stayed at the house of Balaram Bose in Calcutta, made sacred by the visits of Shri Ramakrishna. In the last week of March

1922, Maharaj went to stay there. Suddenly, on 24th March, he had an attack of cholera. The best doctors were called in, the best attendants were engaged. But he had hardly recovered from the attack when symptoms of diabetes developed which took an alarming turn. Out of great anxiety, different kinds of treatment were tried, different physicians were called in, but there was no sign of any improvement. He had great suffering attended with various ailments. But even in that state he began to talk of high spiritual things punctuated with masterly strokes of sudden humour. In a great spirit of compassion he began to bless one and all. The devotees apprehended that this might mean his bidding farewell. Shri Ramakrishna had one day had a vision that floating on the waters of the Ganga there came a thousand-petalled lotus illumining the whole surroundings. On the lotus stood a boy holding the hands of Shri Krishna. When the Master first met Rakhal, he identified him as that boy. But he kept that vision secret, giving it out only to a select few, and said that if Rakhal recollected his true identity, he would give up his body. Now Swami Brahmananda, in an ecstatic state, began to refer exactly to the same vision that the Master has seen. People grew more alarmed at this. Another day passed. The following evening, on 10th April, Swami Brahmananda closed his eyes in deep Samadhi, and the spirit which had put on mortal flesh for the benefit of humanity fled away.

So long as the devotees and disciples lived with Maharaj they were enveloped in ceaseless bliss. But now everybody felt as if a great Himalayan peak had suddenly been bodily removed. Everyone began to ask himself, "Now, what about the future?" And those who

had moved with him closely thought within themselves. "Was it a fact that we lived with a soul like that of Maharaj? Indeed, what have we done to deserve that blessed privilege?" A great dream had faded away all too suddenly.

TEACHINGS

Practise a little Japa and meditation every day. Never stop for a single day. The mind is like a restless child, it wants to run away. You must bring it back again and again and apply it to the meditation on the Lord. Go on this way for two or three years, and then an inexpressible joy will fill your mind. Meditation and Japa appear dry in the beginning. But still you must engage the mind in the contemplation of the Deity, like swallowing a bitter medicine. Slowly spiritual joy will grow in you. People work so hard to pass an examination! To realise God is even easier than that. Only let them call on Him with a calm, cheerful heart.

Initiation into a Mantra helps concentration of mind, otherwise your mind will change and fluctuate ; today you will like the Kali-form, tomorrow the Hari-form, and next day perhaps the formless aspect of God. And thus your mind will not be concentrated on any one.

Pranayama and other Yogic practices are not suitable to the present times and conditions. One must observe complete Brahmacharya in order to practise them. One's food must be absolutely pure, Sattvika, and one must be guided by an expert teacher.

Practice is the means of concentrating the mind. Pranayama, breath-control, is also one of the means. But it is not safe for a householder; if one is not continent, one falls ill. Moreover, one must have nutritious food, a fine place, and pure air. In order to have meditation and concentration, you must practise in

solitude ; the more you will try, the more you will achieve. Wherever you find conditions favourable, say if there is a fine scenery, sit down to meditate.

God is with form and is also formless and He is also above form and formlessness. What does Vedanta mean by saying that "Brahman is true and the world is false"? That the world as we see it now is false. The world vanishes in Samadhi, but you feel that you are experiencing a great joy.

There is a spiritual eye of wisdom between the two eyebrows. When its vision opens, a fountain of joy is released. The whole universe is seen to be merged in bliss.

This apparent universe, which you see, is within the domain of the mind. The mind is the author, the mind has conjured it up. It cannot go beyond its own domain. Behind the mind, of which we are aware, is a subtle spiritual mind, existing in seed form. Through contemplation, prayer, and Japa this mind develops, and with its unfoldment a new vision opens. This subtle mind also cannot reach God, the supreme Atman. But it leads you near Him. At this stage, the world loses all its charm for the aspirant. He remains absorbed in the consciousness of God. Next comes Samadhi. The experience of Samadhi is indescribable —beyond *is* and *is not*. In this blessed experience there is neither happiness nor misery, neither light nor darkness. All is infinite Being, inexpressible.

The mind is susceptible to suggestions. It learns whatever you teach it. If through discrimination you can impress upon it the joy and fullness of life in the spirit and the folly of worldly attachments, then your mind will devote itself more and more to God.

Everyone must have an ideal firmly established in his life. This ideal must never be lowered. The supreme ideal of human life is to know God—God.

The Guru leads the disciple through different stages until he leaves him with the Lord. But there is no greater Guru than your own mind. When the mind has been purified through prayer and contemplation, it will direct you from within. Even in your daily duties this Guru will guide you.

The way of steadying and purifying the mind is to retire into solitude, control all cravings, and engage yourself in contemplation and meditation. The more you occupy the mind with holy thoughts, the greater will be your spiritual unfoldment.

Another means of steadying the mind is to let it wander ; but keep watch over its workings. After some time the mind gets tired and comes back to find peace in God. If you watch your mind, the mind, in turn, will keep watch over you.

Can anything be achieved without spiritual discipline? Do you not see what severe disciplines even Avataras had to perform?

Be self-reliant. Effort is indispensable to success in spiritual life. Follow some discipline for at least four years. Then, if you don't make any tangible progress, come back and slap my face.

Resign yourself utterly to the Lord. He is everything. There is nothing besides. Never be calculating. Is self-surrender possible in a day?

Work and worship must go hand in hand. It is very good if one can devote oneself solely to spiritual practices. But how many can do that? Two types of men can sit still without work. One is the idiot, who is

too dull to be active. The other is the saint who has gone beyond all activity. Work is a means to the state of meditation. Instead of working for yourself, work for the Lord. Know that you are worshipping the Lord through your work.

I will declare again and again and emphasize this truth—that however busy you may be in carrying out your duties, you must practise Japa and meditation. If you work and forget God, egotism and pride will overpower you. Therefore I tell you, never forget God, no matter whether you are working or sitting idle. To maintain this attitude, you must keep your spiritual practices as well, whatever happens.

The *Gita* and other scriptures emphasize the ideal of worship and meditation in the midst of the activities of life. I can confirm this from my own experience. "Work and worship" is the surest way to spiritual progress.

Why are you afraid of work? Work for Him. You can overcome all disinclination for work if you consider it as dedicated to God.

In performing Japa and meditation, certainly sufficient time and favourable conditions are important. But those who are inclined to practise spiritual exercises will do so under all circumstances. Cultivate the habit of constantly remembering God whether you are idle or engaged in work.

SWAMI PREMANANDA

Shri Ramakrishna used to refer to half a dozen among his disciples as Ishwarakotis (divine and ever free); and to this select group belonged Swami Premananda. Talent and greatness like cream do not always float on the top; oftentimes they lie hidden like gems in the dark caves of the sea. And though the aroma of this saint of angelic beauty and sweetness did not travel beyond a small circle of devotees and acquaintances, yet he occupies a place of great eminence among the children of Shri Ramakrishna.

Swami Premananda was born on December 10, 1861, in the prosperous and picturesque village of Antpur, in the district of Hooghly, Bengal. His parents came of two well-to-do and influential Kayastha families of the village. His father Taraprasanna Ghosh was a man of piety, who had inherited enough means to meet the demands of the family with ease and to conduct the daily service of the household deity, Shri Lakshminarayana. Taraprasanna Ghosh was married to Matangini Dasi, daughter of Abhay Chandra Mitra, of the same village. Like her husband, she was also of devout disposition; and they formed a happy pair. The couple had a daughter and three sons. The daughter's name was Krishnabhavini and the sons were called Tulsiram, Baburam, and Shantiram. Of these Baburam came to be known in later life as Swami Premananda, though he was familiarly called Baburam Maharaj.

The marriage of Krishnabhavini with Balaram Bose of Calcutta brought Taraprasanna's family into close

touch with Shri Ramakrishna some years later. Balaram paid frequent visits to Shri Ramakrishna. Often he would take his wife and children with him. One day he took his mother-in-law also to Shri Ramakrishna. The devoted lady was highly pleased with the meeting and felt herself blessed by seeing him.

Born of pious parents, Baburam had a natural slant towards spirituality. But blood cannot explain all the rich endowments native to the soul of young Baburam. A few memories of his childhood, accidentally preserved, acquire a great significance in the light of later events. Renunciation spoke through the broken accents of his childhood. When a mere stripling of a few summers, if anybody teased him about marriage, he would lisp out his protestations, "Oh, don't marry me, don't don't ; I will die then." His mates in the village school were drawn to this young cherub by an invisible tie of affection ; they regarded him as their near and dear one. At eight years his ideal was to lead a life of renunciation with a fellow monk in a hut shut out from the public view by a thick wall of trees. Later on we shall see how correctly his boyish dreams anticipated future events. He loved to associate with holy men from the period of his adolescence. The sight of ascetics on the banks of the Ganga drew the comely boy to them ; and in their company he would be unaware of the flight of time.

Passing out of the village school, Baburam came to Calcutta for higher studies. After joining the Aryan School for some time, he finally entered the Shyampukur Branch of the Metropolitan Institution. At this time Mahendra Nath Gupta, later the celebrated author

of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* happened to be the headmaster of the school. By another curious coincidence, Rakhal (later Swami Brahmananda) was also a student of the school and read in the same class as Baburam. The two boys quickly became drawn to each other by a hidden tie, and there soon sprang up between them an intimate relationship which was only deepened with the passage of years. About this time Rakhal also came under the influence of the Master and began visiting Dakshineswar now and then. These contacts brought to Baburam's notice the holy personality of the Master and opened up opportunities which led to an early acquaintance with him.

Baburam chanced to see Shri Ramakrishna for the first time in a Hari Sabha at Jorasanko, where the latter had gone to hear the chanting of the *Bhagavata*, though Baburam scarcely knew then that he had seen him. He also heard from his elder brother about a monk at Dakshineswar, who, like Shri Gauranga, lost all consciousness of the world while uttering the name of God. Baburam became eager to see the saint. He knew that Rakhal was in the habit of visiting Dakshineswar frequently, and it was settled that on the following Saturday they should go together to see him. On the appointed day, after school hours, they set out by boat and were joined on the way by an acquaintance named Ramdayal Chakravarti, who also used to visit Shri Ramakrishna. Rakhal inquired of Baburam if he would like to stay for the night. Baburam thought that they were going to a monk who live in a hut, and replied, "Will there be accommodation for us?" Rakhal only said, "There may be." The question of food troubled Baburam, and he asked, "What shall we

eat at night?" Rakhal simply said, "We shall manage somehow."

At sunset they reached the temple of Dakshineswar.[1] Baburam was fascinated with the beauty of the place which looked like fairyland. They entered the Master's room, but he was not there. Rakhal asked them to wait and hurried to the temple. In a few minutes he was seen leading the Master by the hand. The Master was in a state of God-intoxication, and Rakhal was carefully directing his staggering footsteps, warning him of the high and low places. Reaching his room he sat a while on the small bedstead and presently regained normal consciousness. He inquired about the newcomer. When Ramdayal introduced Baburam, Shri Ramakrishna said: "Ah, you are a relative of Balaram! Then you are related to us also." After a little more familiar talk, Shri Ramakrishna caught hold of Baburam's hand and said, "Come closer to the light. Let me see your face." In the dim light of an earthen lamp he carefully scrutinised his features. Satisfied with the results of the examination, he nodded his head in approbation. Next he examined the boy's arms and legs. Finally he said, "Let me see your palm." He looked at it and placed it upon his own as if to weigh it. Then he said, "All right, all right." Turning to Ramdayal he said, "Narendra has not come here for a long time, and I feel a great longing to see him. Will you ask him to come here one day? You won't forget it?"

Ramdayal said, "I shall ask him positively."

The night advanced. It was about ten o'clock.

[1] Most probably in 1882 (vide *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 90).

Ramdayal had brought a large quantity of food for the Master who took only a part of it, arranging the rest to be distributed among the three devotees. Then the Master asked them where they preferred to sleep —in his own room or outside. Rakhal chose inside, but Baburam thought that his presence might disturb the meditation of the saint. So he and Ramdayal preferred to sleep outside, though Shri Ramakrishna invited them to remain within.

The two devotees had already fallen asleep when they were roused by the cry of guards. Presently the Master approached them reeling like a drunkard with his loin cloth under his arm. Addressing Ramdayal he said, "Hullo, are you asleep?" "No, sir", was the reply. Then the Master said with great eagerness, "Will you please tell him to come? I feel as if somebody were wringing my heart like this"—and he twisted his cloth. His every word and gesture expressed the unspeakable agony of heart at the separation from Narendra Nath. "What love!" thought Baburam, "But how queer that he does not respond?" Shri Ramakrishna proceeded a few steps towards his room. Then he returned and said to Ramdayal, "Then don't forget to tell him about it." He repeated these words and went back to his bed with staggering gait. About an hour after he appeared again and unburdened his mind to Ramdayal: "Look here, he is very pure. I look upon him as the manifestation of Narayana and cannot live without him. His absence is wringing my heart like this", and he again twisted his cloth. Then he said in bitter anguish, "I am being put on the rack, as it were, for his sake. Let him come here just once." The scene was repeated at hourly intervals throughout the night.

When Baburam met the Master next morning, he found him quite a different man. His face was calm like a sea after the storm, no anxiety lined his face. He asked Baburam to go round the Panchavati. As he advanced towards the spot a strange sight greeted his eyes. The place looked so familiar and known. We knew how his boyish imagination used to conjure up the vision of a hermit's life in future in a secluded spot. What was his astonishment when he found that the Panchavati tallied exactly with his dreams of boyhood! How could he have foreshadowed the picture so accurately? He, however, kept this to himself and returned to the Master. In response to a question as to how he liked the place, he only said it was nice. The Master then asked him to visit the Kali temple, which he did. When he took leave of Shri Ramakrishna, the latter affectionately asked him to come again.

The visit left a deep impression on Baburam's mind. "He is an exceptionally good man", he thought, "and dearly loves Naren. But strange that Naren does not go to see him." The next Sunday at eight o'clock he again went to Dakshineswar. A few devotees were seated before the Master, who welcomed him and said, "It is nice that you have come. Go to the Panchavati where they are having a picnic. And Narendra has come. Have a talk with him." At the Panchavati, Baburam found Rakhal who introduced him to Narendra and some other young devotees of the Master who had assembled there. From the first Baburam was filled with admiration for Narendra. To look at him was to love him. Narendra was talking with his friends. Presently he burst into a song, which charmed Baburam. With bated breath he listened saying to

himself, "Ah, how versatile he is!"

This became the prelude to a closer association with Shri Ramakrishna, whose great love, purity, and holiness drew Baburam nearer and nearer to him as days went on. Slowly the knowledge began to dawn on Baburam that his relation with him was not of this life alone, but dated from a remote existence. In the personality of Shri Ramakrishna he discovered the realisation of the highest ideals of life, whose vague contours flitted across his mind in the dreams and phantasies of his boyhood.

Baburam was just twenty when he met the Master, though he appeared to be much younger and very handsome. His character was untouched by the least blemish of the world. Indeed to the end of his days he maintained a childlike innocence and was unaware of the common erring ways of humanity. Shri Ramakrishna divined his absolute purity and held him very high in his estimation. In a vision he saw Baburam as a goddess with a necklace. This gave him an inkling as to the personality of this disciple. "It is a new vessel, and milk can be put into it without fear of turning"—this was that he used to say of the boy. He would also say, "Baburam is pure to his very marrow. No impure thought can ever cross his mind and body."

Owing to his absolute purity Baburam was deemed a fit attendant for Shri Ramakrishna, who liked to have him about. The inner group of disciples of the Master began to come from 1879; from that time onward they began to take personal care of him. Among them Rakhal and Latu attended on him continuously for a fairly long period. After a time Rakhal had to be away occasionally, so the Master sometimes felt difficulty with

regard to his personal care. There were others, no doubt, but the Master could not bear the touch of all in all his moods. So one day he said to Baburam: "Such is my condition that I cannot bear the touch of all. You stay here, then it will be very good." Baburam began to stay there now and then, though he did not dare to do so permanently, apprehending trouble from home.

Closer association with the Master drove Baburam's mind so inward that studies became insipid to him, and he began to neglect them. In 1884 he appeared in the Entrance Examination and failed to get through. When Shri Ramakrishna heard about it he said, "So much the better; he has been released from bonds", playing a pun on the Bengali expression *pâsh* which means bondage and sounds like the English word "pass". Baburam heaved a sigh of relief on hearing this. The Master had not failed to notice that Baburam was neglecting his studies. To test the boy's mind he asked him one day: "Where are your books? Do you not mean to continue your studies?" And then turning to Mahendra Nath Gupta, who was present, he said, "He wants to have both", and added, "Very difficult is the path. What will a little knowledge avail? Just imagine the sage Vasishtha being seized with grief at the loss of his son! Lakshmana was amazed at it and asked Rama the reason. Rama replied, 'Brother, there is nothing to wonder at. Whoever has knowledge has also ignorance. May you go beyond both.' " "I want just that", Baburam smilingly replied. The Master said: "Well, is it possible to have that if you stick to both? If you want that then come away." Still smiling Baburam replied, "You please draw me away."

Baburam's mother had already become a devotee of Shri Ramakrishna. One day as she came to see him, the latter requested her to leave her son with him. The mother was rather pleased and gave her ungrudging consent. She only asked that she might have devotion to God and that she might never live to suffer the bereavement of her children. Her desires were fulfilled. From this time on Baburam began to live constantly with the Master, who used to call him *daradi,* i.e. the companion of his soul ; so great was the love the Master bore towards him.

In later years Swami Premananda would often recount with tenderness the Master's great love for him. "Do I love you?" he would say addressing the young monks of the Math, "No, if I did, I would have bound you for ever to me. Oh, how dearly the Master loved us! We do not even bear a hundredth of that love towards you. When I would fall asleep while fanning him at night, he would take me inside his mosquito net and make me sleep on his bed. When I would remonstrate with him saying that it would be sacrilegious for me to use his bed, he would reply, 'Outside, mosquitoes will bite you. I shall wake you up when necessary.' " The Master would often come to Calcutta to see Baburam and feed him, through his own hands, with sweets which he brought from Dakshineswar. And often the intensity of affection made the Master cry out like a child when Baburam was away from him in Calcutta.

Shri Ramakrishna's love and sweet words began to mould the pliant soul of the young disciple. His life was the greatest teacher of all, and he taught in strange ways. One night Baburam was sleeping in the Master's

room. After some time he was awakened by the sound of the Master's steps. Opening his eyes he found Shri Ramakrishna pacing up and down the room in a state of trance with his cloth under his arm. A feeling of deep abhorrence was written on his features. With a face flushed with emotion, the Master was repeating vehemently, "Away with it! Away with it!" and praying, "O Mother, don't give me fame, Oh, don't Mother!" It appeared to the boy as if the Divine Mother was following the Master with a quantity of fame in order to make a present of it to him and that he was remonstrating with Her. The incident impressed the boy so profoundly that he conceived the uttermost hatred of fame for life.

The holy life of the saint of Dakshineswar sharpened the boy's appetite for religious experiences. In the saint's company he noticed that many went into ecstasies while hearing devotional songs, and he felt sad that he was denied such experiences. He pressed the Master that he might also enjoy such states. At his importunities the Master prayed to the Divine Mother for his sake, but was told that Baburam would have Jnana (knowledge) instead of Bhava (ecstasies). This delighted the Master.

One day Pratap Chandra Hazra,[1] in his characteristic way, was advising Baburam and some other young boys to ask of Shri Ramakrishna something tangible in the shape of occult powers, instead of, as was their wont, merely living a jolly life with him with plenty of good things to eat. Shri Ramakrishna, who was near, scented

[1] Who lived at the Dakshineswar temple and often sat near the Master's room with all the paraphernalia of a spiritual life to make a show of his supposed saintliness.

mischief-making and calling Baburam to his side said, "Well, what can you ask? Is not everything that I have yours already? Yes, everything I have earned in the shape of realisations is for the sake of you all. So get rid of the idea of begging which alienates by creating distance. Rather realise your kinship to me and gain the key to all that treasure."

When the Master fell ill and was brought to Cossipore for treatment, Baburam served him whole-heartedly; and after the Master's demise, he joined the monastery at Baranagore. During the Christmas-tide of 1886, Narendra Nath took the young band of the Master's disciples to the ancestral place of Baburam at Antpur. Here they spent about a week in holy discourse and in intense meditation. The imagination of all took fire at Naren's eloquent portraiture of the glories of a life of renunciation, and they decided to take up the monk's garb. On returning to Baranagore, they took formal initiation into Sannyasa. Narendra gave Baburam the name of Premananda as he thought it conformed to the remark of the Master that Shri Radha, the Goddess of divine Love, Herself was partially incarnated in him.

First at Baranagore, then at Alambazar, the little band passed days of hard austerities. On Swami Ramakrishnananda's departure to Madras in 1897 to preach the message of the Master there, Swami Premananda took up the duties of the daily worship of the shrine. Some time later he left for a pilgrimage in Northern India and returned on the eve of the removal of the monastery to Belur in the beginning of 1898. Here he again resumed the worship of the Master.

A new chapter of his life opened with the passing away of Swami Vivekananda. One could hardly realise

then what boundless love and tenderness, what compassion and sweetness, what leonine power and great fire lay hidden within this meek and unobtrusive figure. The heavy responsibilities which came to rest on his shoulders gradually unfolded the beauty and richness of his personality. The task of looking after the affairs of the Mission had devolved on Swami Brahmananda. For this reason he had to travel in different parts of the country. So Swami Premananda was entrusted with the management of the Math at Belur. The daily service in the shrine, the training of the young Brahmacharins and Sannyasins, the various household duties of the monastery, the receiving of devotees and guests and instructing them on spiritual matters—all these crowded his hours with activities and left him little respite.

The father is reflected in the son. Some of Shri Ramakrishna's disciples specially recalled some aspects of the infinite excellences of the Master. Swami Premananda mirrored more than anyone else the Master's all-consuming love for all. Monks, householders, devotees, visitors, and guests, all felt the tenderness of his affection and came to regard him as the mother of the monastery. Like an indulgent mother, he sheltered under his protecting wings those whose perverse ways had alienated them from society. His sympathy unlocked in many of these lost souls of the world unsuspected springs of devotion and service.

A young man of Calcutta had strayed into evil paths under the influence of vicious company. An addict to intoxicants, he appeared to be heading towards utter ruin every day. The efforts of his friends and relatives to wean him away from his associates and habits came

to naught. In the end they abandoned all hope in despair. Fortunately one of the relatives of the young man happened to be acquainted with Swami Premananda. He related everything to the Swami and begged his mercy. The Swami listened to everything patiently. He went to the boy's place one day and asked him to come to the Math. The boy came and enjoyed the day at the Math. As he was returning the Swami asked him to come again. The boy felt attracted to the Swami even at the first meeting and visited the Math several times. The alchemy of the Swami's love and kindness slowly transmuted the base metal of the boy's character. "How strange!" he thought, "how could he bestow such tenderness and affection upon me who have been shunned even by my relatives and acquaintances in horror and shame. He knows all my misdeeds. No worldly ties bind me to him. No selfishness rules his affection. Yet how wonderful is his love!" Shortly afterwards he gave up the world and embraced the life of renunciation and service.

Drawn by the invisible bonds of Baburam Maharaj's (Swami Premananda's) love and consideration, the devotees began to flock in larger numbers to the Math. A single meeting sufficed to create a lasting impression on their minds. The springs of action of great saints remain hidden from public gaze. Baburam Maharaj's purity and devotion and the Master's grace had lifted him to a plane of realisation where the service of man became transformed into the worship of God. The extreme care which the Swami took in receiving and entertaining the devotees betrayed to the dullest mind glimpses of his transformed outlook. None could leave the Math without being entertained. The visitors

often turned up at odd hours, so the midday meal could not usually be served earlier than one or two in the afternoon. And sometimes it so happened that a group of devotees unexpectedly arrived from a distant place while the monks were resting their tired limbs late in the afternoon. Swami Premananda would then proceed alone in silence to the kitchen to cook food for them himself, as he did not want to trouble the boys in their rest. The young monks, however, when they came to know of this, would hurry to the kitchen and do everything. Baburam Maharaj was highly pleased with those who came forward. He used to encourage and bless them saying, "Well, the householders have to do a lot of things. Is it possible for them to come always at the proper time? And what can we do for them? We can only serve them and that costs us nothing but a little physical trouble. Through the Master's grace nothing is wanting here. Should we not be blessed by giving these things to his children?"

Concern for the devotees did not leave him even during his fatal illness. If anybody remonstrated with him for his anxiety lest it should affect his health, he would reply, "It is my nature. The service of the devotee is the worship of God." A couple of days before he passed away, he called to his side a Sannyasin who looked after the management of the Math during his absence and asked him in a voice tender with emotion, "Could you possibly do one thing?" The Sannyasin replied, "Please tell me what I am to do." "Will you be able to serve the devotees?" was the question he met with. "Yes, I shall", was his reply. "Don't forget, then", said Baburam Maharaj almost imploringly.

Standing on the adamant of faith, Swami Premananda believed that everybody who chanced to partake of the food which had been offered to the Master was sure to put forth the sprout of spirituality at some future date. In his eyes persons who visited the Math had some special worth in them. He used to say, "Innumerable are the places where people can seek pleasure! Some go to garden-houses, and others, maybe, to places of amusement. But those who come here, must, therefore, be understood to have some spiritual worth in them. Or, why should they come at all?"

His ministrations did not end with entertainments of a merely physical nature. He was anxious above everything that the devotees should grow in spirituality. He would snatch a few moments from his crowded hours in order to infuse into their hearts a spirit of devotion to God and the ideal of detachment. His words, having their roots in love and untarnished by the slightest speck of egotism, would find their way direct into the sanctuary of the soul. He talked to the visitors and the new-comers when they had rested for a while after the midday meal, and again after the evening service he talked to those who happened to have stayed on. His one idea was to kindle the fire of devotion in them. When he spoke, an exalted feeling would take possession of their minds, and they would always experience a certain degree of spiritual uplift.

During holidays and vacations students would sometimes come to spend a few days at the Math. Baburam Maharaj treated them as would a mother. He often wrote instructive letters to those who came in close contact with him. His words and influence spread into the hearts of many a young soul and tinged them with

the dye of a noble idealism. A good many monks of the Ramakrishna Order today look back to his inspiration as the decisive influence on their lives. To him they owe a debt which they cannot repay.

The Swami's solicitude for the well-being of the novitiates in the monastery knew no bounds. With infinite patience he endeavoured not only to instil into them the supreme ideal of renunciation and service but also to train them in the various practical duties of life. He aimed at an all-round development of abilities and disliked one-sidedness. "You should learn", he would say, "how to work in every walk of life—be it service in the shrine, cooking in the kitchen, the tending of cows, or scavenging. Be they great or small, all works should receive your equal attention. Always take as much care of the means as of the ends." Though he would eye with disfavour the slightest indifference to work, he was quick to forgive and forget all remissness.

Great teacher as he was, he knew that the leader must be prepared to sacrifice and to set the example. He taught more by his actions than by precepts. One of his favourite sayings was that a leader (Sardar) must be ready to sacrifice his head (Sirdar). A remarkable incident reveals not only this trait of his character but also his breadth of vision free from the trammels of a conventional social code.

A Mohammedan gentleman from Diamond Harbour, in the district of Twenty-four Parganas, had one day come to the Math with a few Hindu friends. After he had visited the shrine, he was given some food on a few leaves. Everybody present showed some hesitation in taking away the leaves and cleaning the spot after the gentleman had partaken of the food from

them. Noticing this Swami Premananda came forward and took them away to the great surprise and discomfiture of all. A similar event also took place during his visit to East Bengal in 1917. A Mohammedan of a village in Mymensingh, where Baburam Maharaj had gone, heard him speak of the one God who existed in all. Thereupon he asked the speaker if he could partake of the food touched by him. "Yes, I can," came the quick reply. Immediately some food was brought in a plate, and he partook of it from the hands of the Mohammedan without the least hesitation.

The management of the vast organisation with its members of diverse temperaments and natures made heavy demands on Swami Premananda's endurance, patience, and forgiveness. His spirit was more than equal to it. One day he revealed to a senior monk of the Order with what mind he proceeded to his daily duties. He said, "After finishing my meditation and Japa when I come down the stairs of the shrine, I utter again and again the Mantra of the Master—'Endure, endure, endure (sa, sha, sha),' one who endures abides, one who does not is ruined." Devoid of any trace of pride and egotism, he felt himself to be an instrument in the hands of the Master. His lofty spiritual vision had clothed the world with a divine light from which evil had taken its flight. In the errors of others he detected his own shortcomings. He wrote in several of his letters:

"This lesson I have learnt at the feet of the Master. When the boys do any wrong, I reason and find that they are not at fault. Whatever fault there is, is mine. I do not harbour the idea that I am good. I have come to learn. There is no end to learning. May the

Master give us right understanding—this is my prayer. . . . By observing the faults of others we are gradually infected by them. We have not come to look at the faults of others and to correct them. But it is only to learn that we are here. . . . Lord, Thou art everything. Whom should I scold? Everything is He; there is only a difference in the quantity of dust that covers the gold."

Despite this meekness of spirit and humility, he could be stern as well if it became necessary. When sweet words and loving counsels fell on deaf ears, he would not hesitate to reprimand the delinquents severely. It was, however, a rebuke which had no sting in it. If it made the boys sulk, he would soothe them with affectionate words and offer them the best things to eat.

Swami Premananda was loved and honoured because in life and talk he was full of the Master. On the younger monks he impressed the idea that all their duties were a sort of worship to the Master, to whom indeed belonged the whole monastery and the Mission. The devotees were to be served because they were his, the ground was to be kept clean because he walked there and so on.

During his last illness at Deoghar, a devotee used to bring the best available things for his attendants to eat. One day he scolded one of the attendants for taking such things, saying, "The Master used to say that a Sadhu must restrain his greed and lust, and take only half a meal at night. But you are doing just the opposite out of greed." The attendant felt hurt and left the place without anybody's knowledge. At the time of the midday meal Baburam Maharaj noticed his absence and grew anxious. He suspected that the young man had taken his rebuke to heart and left the

place. He sent out his other attendants to find him, but they failed. In the evening, while he was sitting in a sad mood, the attendant entered the house by a backdoor. Coming to know of this he called him to his side and said, "My boy, I am old and weakened by illness. I cannot always keep my temper. Should you fly into a rage if I happen to say anything in my present condition?" As he said this, tears filled his eyes. And he brought some sweets and fed him with his own hands.

He laid great stress on the gentleness of behaviour. "Be gentle first", he would often repeat, "if you desire to be a Sadhu!" He regretted, "Nowadays none pays any attention to social and common good manners and gentle behaviour. The Master used to take extreme care to teach us these things." And by his eloquent and impassioned appeals, he would firmly impress upon the novitiates the high ideals of the Master and Swamiji (Swami Vivekananda).

In obedience to the advice of Swami Vivekananda, Swami Premananda did not to the end of his days make any personal disciples. Yet his eagerness to help all along the path of spirituality seemed beyond comparison. Every action of his betrayed his anxiety for the spiritual welfare of the young flock under his care and supervision. He is even said to have imparted spiritual power to a young monk by a touch. Besides his own help, he used to send those who pressed him for initiation to the Holy Mother or to Swami Brahmananda and had them initiated by them.

It was Swami Vivekananda's dream that the Mission he founded should become the rallying point of a new resurgent spirit in India and that the monastery at

Belur should become a great centre of learning from which would emanate noble and inspiring ideas. Swami Premananda made earnest efforts to realise an aspect of Swamiji's dream, namely to convert the Math into a great centre of Sanskrit learning. Through his efforts a study circle was gradually formed under the guidance of a competent pundit. He also encouraged the study of other subjects like Western philosophy. The dissemination of education among the illiterate masses also interested him greatly. He blessed and encouraged all who undertook such activities. He wrote to one:

"Be you the torch-bearers in the path of spreading knowledge. The cultivation of knowledge in the company of the Sadhus will impart a new appearance to the country, and the boys will have their life's aims correctly determined. It is only by so doing that the boys will become men—nay, they will become Rishis and gods. . . . What will one school or three or four Sevashramas avail? Have faith in God's grace, establish schools and Sevashramas in every town, village, and hamlet."

To his saintly eye, women were the manifestations of the Divine Mother. His attitude to them was literally one of worship. He behaved himself like a child in their presence. Drawn by his guileless manners, spotless purity and charm, and a certain amount of feminine grace about him, women found themselves quite at ease in his presence. Even the ladies of certain aristocratic Mohammedan families, where the strict rules of the *purdah* were observed, would come to him at the Maths at Dacca or in Calcutta to listen to his words. Imbued with the ideals preached by Swamiji, he realised that a nation could never be great unless its women were

educated and honoured. He not only exhorted the mothers of the nation to follow in the steps of the ideal womanhood of the past, but took great pains to instil into their minds the necessity of a liberal education. "Let thousands of Niveditas come out of Bengal . . .", he wrote to a lady, "Let there arise anew in the land numbers of Gargis, Lilavatis, Sitas, and Savitris. . . . What better thing is there in this world than learning? Give knowledge, and ignorance will vanish through its culture."

The tie that bound the children of Shri Ramakrishna was built up in equal measure of the strands of love and reverence. This reverential attitude among the brother-disciples was specially manifest in Swami Premananda. In the presence of Swami Brahmananda, the President of the Mission, he behaved himself like a humble servant. He would start his daily work only after saluting him profoundly in the morning, if the latter happened to be at the Math.

He had the typical disregard of a Sadhu for personal comfort. When he sat down to eat, he would take the best things from his plate and distribute them among the junior members. His wardrobe never exceeded the demands of sheer necessity. During his illness at Deoghar a devotee gave to his attendant four shirts for the Swami's use. On coming to know of this, he severely scolded the attendant saying: "I have never been accustomed to keeping too many shirts. Besides, it does not become a monk to have so much clothing." When he passed away, diligent search could discover only an empty canvas bag and a few books which could be preserved as souvenirs.

Thus Swami Premananda lived his unostentatious

life for years, away from the public gaze. After about six years of service in the Math he set out on a pilgrimage to Amarnath in 1910 in company with Swamis Shivananda and Turiyananda. On his return he went on a tour of different parts of Bengal preaching the universal message of the Master. The enthusiasm he evoked by this tour is still a living memory with many. East Bengal in particular was fortunate in sharing his holy company, love and blessing. Wherever he went, his enchanting figure left an unforgettable impression upon all, young and old, high and low. His tour reminded one of the triumphal procession of a hero. Men in crowds followed his trail wherever he stopped. People flocked in from the morning till late at night to listen to a few inspiring words from his lips.

Many touching and remarkable incidents occurred during this journey. One which we are tempted to insert reveals his vision and greatness. In the course of his travels he found a village in Dacca filled with that scourge common in villages, namely, water-hyacinth. He asked the young men who accompanied him to remove the pest and himself proceeded to clear the pond. Inspired by his example the young men at once cleared the whole pond. Nor did they stop there. They organised a party and in several villages of Vikrampur carried on this work of removing water-hyacinths, which had been a standing nuisance for several years.

The long trip told on his health, and he returned to the Math with fever. The doctors diagnosed it to be the deadly Kala-Azar. He was sent to Deoghar for a change. After suffering from the malady for about a year and a half, when he was on the road to recovery,

he suddenly fell a victim to influenza. He was brought down to Calcutta to the house of Balaram Bose. All medical help and care proved to be of no avail, and in the afternoon of Tuesday, July 30, 1918, he left the mortal coil and entered Mahasamadhi in the presence of his brother-disciples and monks of the Order.

The fell disease which held him in its deadly grip could not for a moment becloud the serenity of his faith. As in health, so also in illness, he would ever repeat, "The grace of the Master is the only support"; and the name of Shri Ramakrishna was ever on his lips. It is not for ordinary mortals, whose gaze is fixed on the procession of phenomena, to measure the heights of spirituality to which he attained. Only a jeweller can appraise a diamond. Shri Ramakrishna used to refer to him as a jewel-casket. But does that lift the veil of ignorance which obstructs our vision?

Like all men who have soared to the empyrean heights of spiritual realisations, he was reticent about his own experiences. One significant incident which we reproduce here may give a momentary glimpse into the light that burnt within. One day after evening service Swami Premananda sat down for meditation in a corner of the southern verandah of the shrine at Belur Math. The usual period of time flew by, but he did not get up. The attendant of the shrine, when he came to offer Bhoga (offering to the deity), found him sitting stock-still with his body tilted a little backward. He surmised that sleep had overtaken his exhausted flesh. He called him repeatedly, but in vain. He returned after the service, called him again—still there was no response. He then held a light before him. The Swami opened his eyes by and by. On being asked if he had

fallen asleep, the Swami broke into a sweet song, "I am awakened and will sleep no more. I am awake in the state of Yoga. O Mother, I have given back Thy mystic sleep to Thee and have put sleep to sleep." Turning to the attendant he said, "When you find me in that state, don't call me or cry aloud, but repeat the Master's name in my ears. That will bring me back."

TEACHINGS

It is a truism that the world is full of selfishness, but since one has to continue in the world, all the same, it is vain to go on thinking for ever that the world is selfish. One has to apply oneself to work after fully realising the truth of this fact through deep thought and reasoning. "Let the world be selfish, but that should be no excuse for my becoming selfish"—that should be one's attitude. And how can the world continue unless there be selfishness? Selfishness there will be just because the world is what it is. And it is nothing very condemnable, for God created this world and all this selfishness is the result of His Maya. Now, the point is that one should make oneself free from selfishness. Instead of finding fault with the world, one should first find one's own fault. Bearing with all the selfishness of the world, we must become free from the least touch of it—that is our ideal.

To follow the Master means to practise what he taught, otherwise nobody can advance by just offering to him a few flowers or through some momentary sentimental outbursts. One must have deep emotion and at the same time one must reason out everything uncompromisingly. One must give play to one's intellect—else, there is no way out. That is why the Master said, "You should be a devotee, but that's no reason why you should be a fool."

Can one become a great devotee of God simply by dancing and jumping, or by quoting plentifully from the scriptures? What is wanted is freedom from selfish-

ness—freedom from egotism. The present age is in need of selfless heroes in the field of service. Mere talk will not do, this is an age of action, one must prove all this in practice. The need is for silent workers, the need is now for silent preachers.

When one goes on finding fault with others, one becomes imperceptibly infected with those faults. We have not come to this world either for fault-finding or for correcting others, we have come simply to learn. We must always ask ourselves, what we have learnt. If you can, love others, and then you will be blessed with peace and happiness.

One must love the ideal with one's whole heart. Dive deep with whichever name of the Lord appeals to you. It won't do to swim merely on the surface. Call forth faith—faith in the Guru's words, faith in holy men's teachings,. faith in the scriptures, then only you can have results. Mere namby-pamby attitude will be of no avail. You must have this forceful determination. "Even in this life I must attain success, I must become detached, I must become free in this very body. Can there be anything impossible for me?" Throw away all fear and anxiety. Think, "We are the children of God", then weakness will find no loophole to creep in.

Can there be any end of action? So also misery is unending. On the one hand, science is trying to remove misery, and on the other hand, it is bringing about a terrible revolution. So the most reasonable position is to take shelter under God.

The Master descended in disguise as an unlettered man in order to reveal the path of peace. He incarnated in order to smash the pride of scholarship. Be sincere, and meditate on him by making your thoughts

and words fully consistent with each other.

Not mere theory; actualise it—there has been enough of talk and writing. Put the books aside, and let your action speak. This is what the lives of the Master and Swamiji stand for. Reduce the external paraphernalia and serve men as God with all love and utmost sincerity. This will certainly bring you devotion and liberation.

Initiation (by a Guru) is a necessity. One has to move along some definite path, initiation is that path and the Guru is the guide along that path. One must accept a Guru, that is what the scriptures say. One has to abide by the scriptures, not all can become self-made men by independent thinking. Earnestness itself is a Mantra, but not all can have it.

The poor, the weak, the fallen, the ignorant—all these you have to make your very own. And yet I warn you, that in loving one section of society, you must not become hateful of the other—the rich.

Soon you will be blessed with concentration of mind, you need have no anxiety on that score. God Himself blesses one with the power of meditation who thinks of Him. He it is again who ordains holy company, pure mind, and sound intellect. Never desist from meditation. Your mind itself will play the role of holy company, and saintly Guru, and will show you the right path. Go on practising meditation with a little determination. When you become used to it, you will find that you cannot do without it, and you will derive pleasure from it.

Make the whole world your own through love. Let there be none outside the pale, none your enemy. Let there be no egotism, and drive away such foreign ideas

as enmity. Let the whole world become one through love.

We have to make a single community of this whole world. If there is anything that is to be treated as an alien, it is "me and mine". This "me and mine" is the worst enemy. This great enemy has to be killed, extirpated. Then only will this whole world become your own—of God—and full of peace and happiness. And he alone will be able to impart this lesson who has killed "me and mine".

The Master used to say, "The devotees belong to a class by themselves. They are neither Brahmins nor non-Brahmins, neither are they Hindus nor Mussulmans." The devotees belong to the divine class—God's relatives and blood relations—His very own.

The people of this country have no food to fill their stomachs, no cloth to put on, they have no physical stamina, and no continence; they are reduced to skeletons through diseases, and to crown all, the number of their children is on the increase every year. Instead of speaking to them of the Râsalila of Shri Krishna, one should make them hear the words of Shri Krishna, the charioteer of Arjuna and the preacher of selfless work: "Don't become unnerved, O Arjuna"; "Remove your faint-heartedness"; "Be man"; "Enjoy the world". And you have to narrate that ideal life of the great hero Hanuman.

Money can do nothing; it is love and character that can achieve everything. Show it all by your actual life, and then will people listen to you. Let the mouth be closed, and action speak.

SWAMI YOGANANDA

At the time when Shri Ramakrishna was attracting devotees—old and young—to the temple-garden at Dakshineswar, a young man in his teens, belonging to a neighbouring family, used to visit the garden of Rani Rasmani. He had read of Shri Ramakrishna in the literature of the Brahmo Samaj ; but his aristocracy and rural prejudice stood in the way of any personal acquaintance. One day he had a desire for a flower. A man was passing by. The boy took him for a gardener and asked him to pluck the flower for him. The man obliged. Another day the boy saw many people seated in a room in front of that gardener and listening to his discourse. Was this then the Ramakrishna of whom Keshab wrote so eloquently? The boy went nearer but stood outside. At this time the Master asked someone to bring all those who were outside within the room. The man found only a boy and brought him inside and offered him a seat. When the conversation ended and all went away, the Master came to the boy and very lovingly made inquiries about him.

The name of the boy was Yogindra Nath Chaudhury. The Master was delighted to know that the boy was the son of Nabin Chandra Chaudhury, his old acquaintance. The Chaudhurys were once very aristocratic and prosperous, but Yogin's parents had become poor. His father was a very orthodox Brahmin and performed many religious festivals. Shri Ramakrishna, during the period of his spiritual striving, had sometimes attended these festivals, and was thus known to the family.

Yogin was born in the year 1861. From his boyhood he was of a contemplative temperament. Even while at play with his companions, he would suddenly grow pensive, stop play and look listlessly at the azure sky. He would feel that he did not belong to this earth, that he had come from somewhere in some other plane of existence and that those who were near about him were not really his kith and kin. He was simple in his habits and never hankered after any luxury. He was a bit reserved and taciturn by nature. This prevented his friends from being very free with him. But he commanded love and even respect from all. After he was invested with the sacred thread, he spent much of his time in meditation and worship, in which he now and then became deeply absorbed.

Yogin was about sixteen or seventeen when he met Shri Ramakrishna for the first time. He was then studying for the Entrance Examination. At the very first meeting the Master recognised the spiritual potentiality of the boy and advised him to come to him now and then. Yogin was charmed with the warmth and cordiality with which he was received; and he began to repeat his visits as often as he could.

To the people of Dakshineswar Shri Ramakrishna was known as an "eccentric Brahmin". They had no idea that the "eccentricity" in his behaviour was due to his God-realisation and disregard for this world. The orthodox section looked upon him with suspicion because of his seeming regard for strict caste rules etc. Therefore, Yogin did not dare to come to him freely and openly, for he was afraid there would be objections from his parents if they knew about it. So he visited the Master stealthily.

But love like murder will out. Soon it was known that Yogin was very much devoted to Shri Ramakrishna and spent most of his time with him. Yogin's friends and companions began to taunt and ridicule him for this. Of a quiet nature as he was, he met all opposition with a silent smile. His parents were perturbed to see him indifferent to his studies and so much under the influence of Shri Ramakrishna. But they did not like to interfere with him directly as they thought it would be of no avail.

Yogin thought that his continuance of studies was useless, for he had no worldly ambition. But just to help his parents, who were in straitened circumstances, he went to Kanpur in search of some job. He tried for a few months, but could not get any employment. So he devoted his ample leisure to meditation and spiritual practices. He shunned company and liked to live alone with his thoughts. He spoke as little as possible. His movements and behaviour were unusual. The uncle of Yogin with whom he stayed at Kanpur, got alarmed lest he should go out of his mind. He wrote to the father of Yogin all about him and suggested marriage as the only remedy ; for that might create in him an interest in worldly things.

Things were arranged accordingly at home. Yogin knew nothing about this. He only got information that some one was ill at home, and thinking it might be his mother to whom he was greatly devoted, he hurried to Dakshineswar. But to his great dismay he found that he had been trapped; all this was simply a pretext to bring him home for his marriage. He was in a great fix. He was against marriage, for that would interfere with his religious life. His great desire was to live a life of

renunciation and devote all his time and energy to the realisation of God, but now there was a conspiracy to frustrate his noble resolve.

Yogin was too gentle to be able to resist the wishes of his parents—specially of his mother, and in spite of himself he consented to marry. His parents wrongly thought that marriage would wean his mind from other-worldliness. But the effect was just the reverse. The fact that his resolve of living a celibate life had been frustrated, weighed so heavily on his mind that he felt miserable over it. He became moody and brooded day and night over his mistake. He did not even like to show his face to the Master, who had a high expectation about his spiritual future and would be sorely disappointed to learn that he had falsified all his hopes through a momentary weakness.

When the news of all that had happened with regard to his beloved Yogin reached the Master, he sent information again and again to Yogin to come and see him. But Yogin was reluctant to go. Thereupon the Master hit upon a plan to drag him in, and told a friend of Yogin: "Yogin once took some money from here (i.e. from a temple officer). It is strange that he has not returned the money, nor has he given any account of that!" When Yogin heard of this, his feelings were greatly wounded. He remembered that a temple official had given him a small sum to make some purchases for him before he left for Kanpur, and a small balance of that remained. But because of his marriage he had felt ashamed to go to the temple and therefore could not return the unspent money. At the remarks of the Master, however, he was so aggrieved that he resolved to take the earliest opportunity to return the money.

and at the same time he thought that it would be his last visit to him.

Shri Ramakrishna was seated on his cot with his loin cloth on his lap when Yogin came to see him. Putting his cloth under his arm, he ran like a child to receive Yogin as soon as he saw him. Beside himself with joy at the coming of Yogin, the first thing that the Master said to him was: "What harm if you have married? Marriage will never be an obstacle to your spiritual life. Hundreds of marriages will never interfere with your spiritual progress if God is gracious. One day bring your wife here. I shall so change her mind that instead of an obstacle she will be a great help to you."

A dead weight was lifted, as it were, from Yogin's heart, as he heard the Master utter these bold and encouraging words in an ecstatic mood. He saw light where it had been all darkness for him. He was filled with new hope and strength. While taking leave of the Master a little later, he raised the topic of the balance of the money which he was to return, but to this the Master was supremely indifferent. He understood that the earlier remarks about the money had simply been an excuse to bring him there. Now his love and admiration for the Master became all the more great, and he began to repeat his visits.

Even after marriage Yogin was indifferent to worldly affairs just as before. This was a great disappointment to his parents who had thought of binding him to the world through the tie of wedlock. Once the mother of Yogin rebuked him for his growing detachment to the world as unbecoming of one who had a wife to support. He was greatly shocked. Did he not marry only at the earnest importunity of his mother! From this time on,

his aversion for worldly life increased all the more. He thought the Master was the only person who consistently and most selflessly loved him. And he began to spend greater time with him. The Master also found an opportunity to pay greater attention to the training of Yogin.

We have said that Yogin was very soft-natured. It was difficult for him to hurt even an insect. But sometimes too much gentleness becomes a source of trouble rather than a virtue. Shri Ramakrishna noticed this unreasonable softness in the character of Yogin, and he wanted to set this right. He once noticed that there were some cockroaches in his bundle of clothes and asked Yogin to take the bundle outside the room and kill the insects. Yogin took the clothes outside the room. But as he was too gentle to kill the insects, he simply threw them away, hoping that the Master would not follow up the matter. But strangely enough he did inquire whether the cockroaches had been killed. When the answer was in the negative, Shri Ramakrishna gave him a mild reproof, for not obeying his words in toto.

A similar incident happened on another day. Yogin was going from Calcutta to Dakshineswar by a country boat in which there were other passengers as well. One of them began to criticise Shri Ramakrishna as being a hypocrite and so on. Yogin felt hurt at such remarks, but did not utter even a word of protest. The Master needed no defence from Yogin: he was tall enough to be above the reach of any cynicism of fools—Yogin thought. When after coming to Dakshineswar he narrated the incident to Shri Ramakrishna, thinking that the Master would approve of his goodness in not opposing the passengers, the reaction was just the

opposite. He took him to task for pocketing the blasphemy heaped upon the Guru. "A disciple should never hear criticisms hurled against his Guru", said he. "If he cannot protest, he should leave the spot forthwith."

Once Yogin went to the market to make some purchases for the Master. The cunning shopkeeper feigned to be very religious-minded and Yogin took him to be such. But when he returned to Dakshineswar, he found that the shopkeeper had cheated him. This called for a sharp rebuke from the Master. "A man may aspire to be religious ; but that is no reason why he should be a fool", said Shri Ramakrishna by way of correcting him.

Though Yogin trusted a man easily and had the simplicity of a child, he was not a simpleton. Rather he had a keen discriminating mind and was critical in his outlook. But his critical attitude once led him into a quandary. One night he slept in the same room with the Master, but when he woke up in the dead of night he missed him and saw that the door was open. At first he felt curious, then he became suspicious as to where he could have gone at such an unearthly hour. He came outside, but Shri Ramakrishna could not be seen. Did he then go to his wife who was staying at the concert-house just opposite?—Yogin thought. Then Shri Ramakrishna was not what he himself professed to be! He wanted to probe into the mystery, and stood near the concert-house to see if he came out of the room. After some time Shri Ramakrishna came from the Panchavati side and was surprised to see Yogin standing near the concert-house. Yogin was stupefied and felt ashamed of himself for his suspicion. A more sinful act could never be conceived of: to suspect even in thought

the purity of a saint like Shri Ramakrishna! The Master understood the whole situation and said encouragingly, "Yes, one should observe a Sadhu by day as well as at night." With these words he returned to his room, followed mutely by Yogin. In spite of these sweet words, Yogin had no sleep throughout the rest of the night, and later throughout his whole life he did not forgive himself for what he considered to be an extremely sinful act.

There are many incidents to show that Yogin, with all his devotion to the Master, kept his critical faculty alert and did not fail to test him in case of a doubt. Once he asked the Master how one could get rid of the sex-idea. When Shri Ramakrishna said that it could be easily done by prayer to God, this simple process did not appeal to him. He thought that there were so many persons who prayed to God, but nevertheless there came no change in their lives. He had expected to learn from the Master some Yogic practice, but he was disappointed, and came to the conclusion that this prescription of a simple remedy was the outcome of his ignorance of any other better means. During that time there stayed at Dakshineswar a Hatha-Yogi who would show to visitors his dexterity in many Yogic feats. Yogin got interested in him. Once he came to the temple precincts and without meeting the Master went straight of the Hatha-Yogi where he sat listening to his words spellbound. Exactly at that moment the Master chanced to come to that place. Seeing Yogin there, he very endearingly caught hold of his arms and while leading him towards his own room said, "Why did you go there? If you practise these Yogic exercises, your whole thought will be concentrated on the body

and not on God." Yogin was not the person to submit so easily. He thought within himself, perhaps the Master was jealous of the Hatha-Yogi and was afraid lest his allegiance be transferred to the latter. He always thought himself to be very clever. But on second thought he tried the remedy suggested by the Master. To his great surprise he found wonderful results and felt ashamed of his doubting mind. Afterwards Swami Vivekananda used to say, "If there is any one amongst us who is completely free from sex-idea, it is Yogin."

To recount another incident of a similar type. Once he found that the Master was very much perturbed over the fact that his share of the consecrated food of the temple had not been sent to him. Usually the cashier of the temple would distribute the food offered in the temple after the worship had been finished. Being impatient Shri Ramakrishna sent a messenger to the cashier and afterwards he himself went to him to inquire about the matter. Yogin was proud of his aristocratic birth. When he saw the Master agitated over such a trifle, he thought that he might be a great saint, but still his anxiety at missing the consecrated food was the result of his family tradition and influence: being born in a poor priest-family, he was naturally particular about such insignificant things. When Yogin was thinking in this way, the Master came and of his own accord explained, "Rani Rasmani arranged that the consecrated food should be distributed amongst holy men. Thereby she will acquire some merit. But these officers, without considering that fact, give away the offerings at the temple to their friends and sometimes even to undesirable persons. So I am particular

to see that the pious desire of that noble lady is fulfilled." When Yogin heard this, he was amazed to see that even an insignificant act of the Master was not without deep meaning, and he cursed himself for the opinion he had formed.

Yogin grew spiritually under the keen care of the Master. Afterwards when Shri Ramakrishna fell ill and was under medical treatment at Cossipore, he was one of those disciples who laboured day and night in attending to the needs and comfort of their beloved Master. Long strain on this account told upon the none too strong health of Yogin, but the devoted disciple worked undauntedly.

It soon became apparent that no amount of care on the part of the disciples could arrest the progress of the Master's disease. His life was despaired of. One day he called Yogin and asked him to read out to him a certain portion of the Bengali almanac, date by date. When Yogin had reached a certain date and read it, Shri Ramakrishna told him to stop. It was the date on which the Master passed away.

The Mahasamadhi of Shri Ramakrishna threw all into deep gloom. To recover from this shock the Holy Mother went to Vrindaban with Yogin, Kali, Latu, Golap-Ma, Lakshmi Devi, and Nikunja Devi (wife of "M"). At the end of a year the Holy Mother returned to Calcutta. After staying there for a fortnight, Yogin, who now became Swami Yogananda, escorted the Holy Mother to Kamarpukur, from where he went out for Tapasya. When in the middle of 1888 the Holy Mother came to live in Nilambar Babu's garden-house at Belur, Swami Yogananda also returned to attend on her. His service to the Holy Mother was wonderful. In

looking after the comfort of the Holy Mother, he threw all personal considerations to the wind. For, did he not see the living presence of the Master in her? Then to serve her with all devotion and care, he thought, was his best religion. Whenever the Holy Mother left her village home for other places Swami Yogananda used to be on attendance almost invariably. Thus in November 1888 he was with her at Puri, where along with Swami Brahmananda and others they stayed till the beginning of the next year. It is definitely known that he was with her at Ghushuri, near Belur, in 1890, at Nilambar Babu's house at Belur in 1893, at Kailwar in 1894, at a rented house at Sarkarbari Lane, Calcutta, in 1896, and at another rented house at Bosepara Lane, Calcutta, in 1897. Most of the intermediate periods in the early years he spent in Tapasya at various places till his health compelled him to give up the practice and stay permanently in Calcutta.

It is not possible to give a full account of his days of spiritual practice; for not much has been preserved. Some time in 1891, he went to Varanasi where he lived in a solitary garden-house absorbed in spiritual practices. It is said that during this period he would grudge the time he spent even for taking meals. He would beg some day some pieces of bread for his food, and for the following three or four days these pieces, soaked in water, would constitute his only meal. During this time there was a great riot in Varanasi, but he commanded such respect in the vicinity that rioters of both sides would not even disturb him. But the hardship which he was undergoing was too much for his constitution, which broke down completely. He never regained his normal health. From Varanasi he returned

to the Math at Baranagore. He was still ailing. But his bright, smiling face belied his illness. Who could imagine that he was ill when he would be seen engaged whole-heartedly in fun and merry-making with his beloved brother-disciples!

When the Holy Mother came to Calcutta, Swami Yogananda again became her attendant. He spent about a year in devoted service to the Holy Mother. After that he stayed chiefly at the house of Balaram Bose in Calcutta. He was now a permanently sick person—a victim of intestinal ailments. But he was the source of much attraction. So great was his amiability that whoever would come into contact with him would be charmed with him. One would at once feel at home with him. Some young men who got the opportunity of mixing with him at this time afterwards joined the Ramakrishna Order and became monks.

From 1895 to 1897 Swami Yogananda organised public celebrations of the birthday anniversary of Shri Ramakrishna on a large scale at Dakshineswar. And in 1898 he organised a similar celebration at Belur. The success of these celebrations, against tremendous odds, was due to the great influence Swami Yogananda had over men—specially of the younger generation. The organising ability of Swami Yogananda was evidenced also when a grand reception was given to Swami Vivekananda in 1897 on his return from America. Swami Yogananda was the moving spirit behind it.

When Swami Vivekananda, after his return from the West, told his brother-disciples about his proposal to start an organisation, Swami Yogananda was the person to raise a protest. His contention was that Shri Rama-

krishna wanted all to devote their time and energy exclusively to spiritual practices, but that Swamiji, deviating from the Masters' teachings, was starting an organisation on his own initiative. This provoked the great Swami too much and made him unconsciously reveal a part of his inner life. Swamiji feelingly said that he (meaning himself) was too insignificant to improve upon the teachings of that spiritual giant—Shri Ramakrishna. If Shri Ramakrishna wanted he could create hundreds of Vivekanandas from a handful of dust, but that he had made Swamiji simply a tool for carrying out his mission, and Swami Vivekananda had no will but that of the Master. Such astounding faith had the effect of winning over Swami Yogananda immediately. When the Ramakrishna Mission Society was actually started, Swami Yogananda became its Vice-president.

This was not the only occasion when Swami Yogananda showed the power of individual judgement and of a great critical faculty by challenging the very leader—Swami Vivekananda, though his love for the latter was very, very deep. Indeed, one who dared examine the conduct of his Guru with a critical eye before fully submitting to him, could not spare his Gurubhai (brother-disciple). Two years after the incident referred to above, Swami Vivekananda was accused again by some of his Gurubhais of not preaching the ideas of their Master who had insisted on Bhakti and on spiritual practices for the realisation of God, whereas Swami Vivekananda constantly urged them to go about working, preaching, and serving the poor and the diseased. Here also Swami Yogananda started the discussion. At first the discussion began

in a light-hearted mood on both sides. But gradually Swami Vivekananda became serious, till at last he was choked with emotion and found visibly contending with his love for the poor and his reverence for the Guru. Tears filled his eyes and his whole frame began to shake. In order to hide his feelings he left the spot immediately. But the atmosphere was so tense that none dared break the silence even after Swamiji had left. A few minutes later some of the Gurubhais went to his apartment and found him sitting in meditation, his whole frame stiff and tears flowing from his half-closed eyes. It was nearly an hour before Swamiji returned to his waiting friends in the sitting room, and when he began to talk, all found that his love for the Master was much deeper than what could be seen from a superficial view. But he was not allowed to talk on that subject. Swami Yogananda and others took him away from the room to divert his thoughts.

Swami Yogananda commanded respect for his sterling saintly qualities. But what distinguished him among the disciples of the Master was his devoted service to the Holy Mother. He was one of the earliest monks who discovered the extraordinary spiritual greatness of the Holy Mother, hidden under her rural simplicity of manners. The conviction led to an unquestioning dedication to her cause. He looked to her comfort in every way. If by chance a few coins were offered to him by somebody, he preserved these for the Mother's use. He considered no sacrifice too great for her.

When Swami Yogananda became too weak to attend to all the works of the Holy Mother, a young monk (later known as Swami Dhirananda) was taken as his assistant. When the Holy Mother was in Calcutta,

naturally many ladies would flock to her. Seeing the situation, Swami Vivekananda once took Swami Yogananda to task for keeping a young Brahmacharin as his assistant: for, if the celibate life of the latter was endangered, who would be responsible? "I," came the immediate reply from Swami Yogananda, "I am ready to sacrifice my all for him." The words were uttered with so much sincerity and earnestness that everyone who heard them could not but admire the large-heartedness of Swami Yogananda.

Swami Yogananda's health was becoming worse every day, and his suffering soon came to an end. On March 28, 1899, he passed away. He was the first among the monastic disciples of the Master to enter Mahasamadhi. The blessed words that he uttered before death were: "My Jnana and Bhakti have so much increased that I cannot express them." An old Sannyasin brother who was at the bedside at the solemn moment said that they felt all of a sudden such an inflow of a higher state of being, that they vividly realised that the soul was passing to a higher, freer, and superior state of consciousness than the bodily state. Swami Vivekananda was greatly moved at the passing away of Swami Yogananda and very feelingly remarked, "This is the beginning of the end." The Holy Mother also said: "That's like a brick falling out of the wall of a building; it is an evil omen." She cherished his memory affectionately for ever.

Outwardly the life of Swami Yogananda was uneventful. It is very difficult to give or find out details through which one can see his personality. Only those who moved with him closely could see something of his spiritual eminence. One of the younger members

of the Math at that time wrote with regard to him: "He was such a great saint that it fills one with awe to belong, even as the youngest member, to the Order that contained him." Swami Yogananda commanded great love and respect from all the lay and monastic disciples of the Ramakrishna Order. He was one of those whom the Master spotted out as "Ishwarakotis" or "Eternally perfect"—one of the souls which are never in bondage but now and then come to this world of ours for guiding humanity Godwards.

SWAMI NIRANJANANANDA

Swami Niranjanananda was one of those few disciples whom Shri Ramakrishna termed as Nityasiddhas or Ishwarakotis[1]—that is, souls who are perfect from their very birth and are not caught by Maya at any time. With particular reference to Niranjanananda the Master once said that he was born with the characteristics of Rama inherent in him.

The early name of Swami Niranjanananda was Nityaniranjan Ghosh, and he was usually called by the shortened form of Niranjan. He came from Rajarhat-Vishnupur, a village in twenty-four Parganas, but lived in Calcutta with his uncle Kalikrishna Mitra. In his boyhood he became associated with a group of spiritualists in Calcutta. He was very often selected as a medium, and a very successful medium he always proved himself to be. At this time he developed some psychic powers—e.g. powers of curing people in a miraculous way and so on. It is said that a very rich man, suffering from insomnia for eighteen long years, sought the help of Niranjan for recovery. Niranjan said afterwards, "I do not know whether that man got any real help from me. But finding the man suffering so much in life in spite of all his riches and wealth, I was seized with a feeling of the emptiness of all worldly things."

Hearing about the great spiritual power of Shri

[1] Though their names are not definitely known, the following six are accepted as such: Narendra, Rakhal, Yogin, Baburam, Niranjan, and Purna. Except Purna all embraced monasticism.

Ramakrishna, Niranjan one afternoon came to Dakshineswar to see him. Some say that Niranjan came there first with his spiritualist friends. It is said that they tried to make Shri Ramakrishna a medium. At first the Master agreed and sat like an innocent child to be a medium. But soon he disliked the idea and left the seat.

Niranjan was about eighteen years old when he met the Master for the first time. He had a very majestic appearance—being a tall figure with broad shoulders and a strong physique. Though a boy, fearlessness beamed through his eyes.

Shri Ramakrishna was surrounded by a circle of devotees when Niranjan came to him. In the evening when all the devotees dispersed, the Master turned to Niranjan and inquired all about him. Coming to know about his interest in spiritualism, he told young Niranjan, "My boy, if you think of ghosts and spooks, ghosts and spooks you will become. And if you think of God, divine will be your life. Which do you prefer?" "Of course the latter", replied Niranjan. Thereupon Shri Ramakrishna advised Niranjan to sever all connections with the spiritualists, to which Niranjan agreed.

At the very first meeting the Master talked with Niranjan as if he had known him for a long time. Shri Ramakrishna, seeing it was getting dark, pressed Niranjan to pass the night at Dakshineswar. But Niranjan could not do so lest his uncle should be anxious for him. He, however, promised to come again.

This meeting, though short, so much impressed Niranjan that all the time on his way home he kept thinking about Shri Ramakrishna. At home also Shri

Ramakrishna occupied all his thoughts. So within two or three days he again came to him. As soon as the Master saw the boy near the door, he ran to him and warmly embraced him. Then with deep feelings he began to say, "My boy, days are passing, when will you realise God? And if you do not realise God, the whole life will be meaningless. I am extremely anxious as to when you will whole-heartedly devote yourself to God." Niranjan was mute with wonder, and thought, "Strange indeed! How could he be so anxious because I have not realised God! Who could this man be?" Anyway these words, uttered with deep feeling, greatly touched the heart of the boy. He spent the night at Dakshineswar. The next day and the day following that were also spent there in ecstatic joy. It was on the fourth day that he returned to Calcutta. His uncle was in great anxiety for him. When Niranjan returned home, he was scolded for his absence and put under surveillance so that he might not go anywhere. Afterwards, however, Niranjan was permitted to go to Dakshineswar whenever he liked.

Niranjan was very frank and open-minded. The Master liked this trait in him because frankness and open-mindedness, in his opinion, were rare virtues—the effect of much Tapasya in one's previous life and they indicated the possibility of realising God. Niranjan had great abhorrence for married life. When his relatives pressed him for marriage, he was alarmed at the very idea. He thought he was being dragged towards his ruin. He was an extremely pure soul. The Master used to say that Niranjan was without any "Anjan"—i.e. without any blemish in his character.

Niranjan was of violent temper, though he had a

very tender heart. When provoked, he would lose all sense of proportion. One day he was going to Dakshineswar in a country-boat. Some fellow passengers began to speak ill of Shri Ramakrishna in the hearing of Niranjan. Niranjan at first protested. But finding that it was of no avail, he began to rock the boat, threatening to drown the passengers for their misconduct. The robust appearance and the furious mood of Niranjan struck terror into the hearts of the calumniators, who immediately apologised for their improper behaviour. When Shri Ramakrishna heard of this incident, he severely took Niranjan to task for his violent temper. "Anger is a deadly sin, why should you be subject to it? Foolish people in their pitiable ignorance say many things. One should completely ignore them as beneath notice", said Shri Ramakrishna. The reader may contrast this with a similar incident in Swami Yogananda's life, and find for himself how the Master's teaching varied according to the character of the disciple.

At one time Niranjan was compelled to accept a situation in an office. When the news reached Shri Ramakrishna, he was greatly aggrieved and remarked, "I should not have been more pained, had I heard of his death." Afterwards when he learnt that Niranjan had accepted the situation to maintain his aged mother, Shri Ramakrishna breathed a sigh of relief and said, "Ah, then it is all right. It will not contaminate your mind. But if you had done so for your own sake, I could not have touched you. Really it was unthinkable that you could stoop to such humiliation." Hearing these words, when one of the audience asked the Master if he was decrying service and if so, how one

could maintain oneself and one's family, the Master remarked, "Let others do whatever they like. I say these with reference to those young aspirants who form a class by themselves."

Niranjan could not be long in the service. When Shri Ramakrishna was ill at Cossipore, Niranjan was one of those young disciples who stayed with him and day and night attended to his needs, with the hope that they would be able to cure him through their devoted service.

After the demise of the Master all the devotees agreed to inter the ashes somewhere on the Ganga. But later on Ram Chandra Datta and others wanted to take the ashes to Kankurgachhi, in the eastern part of Calcutta. Niranjan is remembered for his bold advocacy of the original plan. By his intervention the greater portion of the ashes was retained by the world-renouncing young men.

After the passing of Shri Ramakrishna, Niranjan joined the monastery at Baranagore and gave himself up heart and soul to the realisation of Truth. Now and then, spurred by the spirit of freedom, which does not allow a monk to confine himself to one place, Niranjan also would go hither and thither; but the monastery at Baranagore and afterwards at Alambazar, when it was removed there, was, as it were, the headquarters for him as also for all his Gurubhais.

He was the peer of Shashi (Swami Ramakrishnananda) in extraordinary steadfastness to the worship of the relic of the Master enshrined in the monastery. His faith in Shri Ramakrishna was so very living that it made him strong enough not to care at all for the praise or the blame of the whole world.

When Swami Vivekananda, after his triumphant success in the West, was returning to India, Swami Niranjanananda hastened to Colombo to receive him there. Afterwards Niranjanananda accompanied Swami Vivekananda to some places in his tour through Northern India. For some time he stayed alone in Varanasi performing Tapasya and living by begging from door to door.

During the last few years of his life he suffered greatly from dysentery, and passed away on the 9th May 1904, from an attack of cholera at Hardwar where he had gone for Tapasya.

Swami Niranjanananda had a very loving heart, though his appearance would inspire awe. His last meeting with the Holy Mother was very touching. "It disclosed", a devotee records, "his loving, impulsive nature. He made no mention of the approaching end, but was like a tearful child clinging to its mother. He insisted that the Holy Mother do everything for him, even feed him, and he wanted only what she had made ready for his meal. When the time came for him to leave her, reluctantly he threw himself at her feet, weeping tears of tender sadness ; then silently he went away, knowing that he would never see her again."

Indeed his devotion to the Holy Mother was unsurpassable. Swami Vivekananda used to say, "Niranjan has got so much devotion to the Holy Mother that I can forgive his thousand and one faults only because of that."

Girish Chandra Ghosh also bore testimony to Niranjan's devotion to the Holy Mother. In those early days the divinity of the Holy Mother was not so widely acknowledged ; and Girish confessed that he too was a

disbeliever. But soon his eyes were opened by Niranjan who first took him to the Holy Mother and then to her village home at Jayrambati, where Girish stayed with Niranjan under the affectionate care of the Holy Mother for some months, deriving thereby immense spiritual benefit. In fact, it was partly through Niranjan's active preaching that many devotees came to recognise the spiritual greatness of the Holy Mother.

There was a strange mixture of tenderness and sternness in him. His love for truth was uncompromising and counted no cost. Once a gentleman of Calcutta built a Shiva temple in the city of Varanasi. When Swami Vivekananda heard of this, he remarked, "If he does something for relieving the sufferings of the poor, he will acquire the merit of building a thousand such temples." When this remark of the great Swami reached the ears of the gentleman, he came forward with a big offer of pecuniary help to the Ramakrishna Mission Home of Service at Varanasi—then in a nucleus state. But afterwards, as the first impulse of enthusiasm cooled down, he wanted to curtail the sum which he had originally offered. This breach of promise so much offended Swami Niranjanananda's sense of regard for truth that he rejected the offer altogether, though that meant great difficulty for the institution.

It is very hard to estimate a spiritual personality by external events. The height of spiritual eminence of a person can be perceived, and that also only to some extent, by the inspiration he radiates. Swami Niranjanananda left the stamp of his life on many persons. Some even renounced everything for the sake of God and joined the Ramakrishna Order because of his influence.

He left one Sannyasin disciple. Above all, to know Swami Niranjanananda we must turn to what the Master said about him: that Swami Niranjanananda was one of his "Antarangas," i.e. belonged to the inner circle of his devotees.

SWAMI SARADANANDA

One day at Dakshineswar Shri Ramakrishna in a state of ecstasy sat on the lap of a young man and said afterwards, "I was testing how much weight he could bear." The young man was none other than Sharat Chandra, and the burden he had to bear in later life as the Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission required superhuman strength. He succeeded because with implicit faith in the Master he could maintain his equanimity under trying circumstances and could tell all around him, "The Master will set everything right. Be at rest."

Swami Saradananda came of a rich and orthodox Brahmin family, living in Amherst Street, Calcutta. His early name was Sharat Chandra Chakravarti. He was born on 23rd December 1865. As the time of birth was a Saturday evening, many were alarmed as to the future of the child. But an uncle of Sharat Chandra, expert in astrology, predicted that the new-born babe would be so great that he would shed lustre on his family.

From his very boyhood Sharat Chandra was so quiet that this could be mistaken for dullness. But soon he showed his extraordinary intelligence in class works. In almost all examinations he topped the list of successful boys. He took delight in many extra-academic activities, and became a prominent figure in the debating class, and his strong physique developed through physical exercise, attracted notice.

His deep religious nature expressed itself even in his early boyhood. He would sit quietly by the side of his

mother when she was engaged in worshipping the family deity, and afterwards faultlessly repeat the ritual before his friends. On festive occasions he would want images of deities and not the dolls which average lads buy, and for a long time the play which interested him most was to perform imitation-worship. After he was invested with the sacred thread, he was privileged to perform regular worship in the family shrine. He was also strict about the daily meditations required of a Brahmin boy.

Sharat was very courteous by nature. He was incapable of using any harsh word to anybody or of hurting anyone's feelings in any way. He had a very soft and feeling heart, and lost no opportunity to help his poor class-friends as far as his means permitted. The small sum of money which he got from home for tiffin, he often spent for poor boys. Sometimes he would give away his personal clothing to those who needed them more. Relations and friends, acquaintances and neighbours, servants and housemaids—whoever fell ill, Sharat Chandra was sure to be by their side. Once a maidservant in a neighbouring house fell ill of cholera. The master removed her to a corner on the roof of his house to prevent infection, and left her there to die. But as soon as Sharat Chandra came to know of this, he rushed to the spot and all alone did everything that was necessary for her nursing. The poor woman died in spite of all his devoted service. Finding the master indifferent about her last rites, Sharat made arrangement even for that.

As he grew up, he came under the influence of the great Brahmo leader Keshab Chandra Sen. Gradually, he began to study the literature of the Brahmo Samaj

and even to practise meditation according to its system.

In 1882 Sharat Chandra passed the University Entrance Examination from the Hare School and the next year he got himself admitted into the St. Xavier's College. Father Laffront was then the Principal of that college. Being charmed with the deep religious nature of Sharat, he undertook to teach him the Bible.

Sharat had a cousin, Shashi, who also stayed in the same family and read in the Metropolitan College. Once a class-friend of Shashi said that there was a great saint in the temple-garden of Dakshineswar about whom Keshab Chandra had written in glowing terms in the *Indian Mirror*. In the course of conversation the three decided that one day they would visit the saint.

It was on a certain day in October 1883, that Sharat and Shashi were at Dakshineswar. Shri Ramakrishna received them very cordially. After preliminary inquiries, when the Master learnt that they now and then went to Keshab's Brahmo Samaj, he was very pleased. Then he said, "Bricks and tiles, if burnt after the trade-mark has been stamped on them, retain these marks for ever. But nowadays parents marry their boys too young. By the time they finish their education, they are already fathers of children and have to run hither and thither in search of a job to maintain the family." "Then, sir, is it wrong to marry ? Is it against the will of God ?" asked one from the audience. The Master asked him to take down one of the books from the shelf and read aloud an extract from the Bible setting forth Christ's opinion on marriage: "For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother's womb ; there are some eunuchs which were made eunuchs of men ; and there be eunuchs which

have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive let him receive." And St. Paul's: "I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, it is good for them if they abide even as I. But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn." When the passage was read, the Master remarked that marriage was the root of all bondage. One among the audience interrupted him saying, "Do you mean to say, sir, that marriage is against the will of God ? And how can His creation go on if people cease to marry ?" The Master smiled and said, "Don't worry about that. Those who like to marry are at perfect liberty to do so. What I said just now was between ourselves. I say what I have got to say ; you may take as much or as little of it as you like."

These stirring words of renunciation opened up a new vision to Sharat and Shashi. Both were charmed by the personality of Shri Ramakrishna. The college, where Sharat was reading, remained closed on Thursdays. He made it a rule to visit Dakshineswar every Thursday unless something very important stood in the way. As he came more and more in touch with Shri Ramakrishna, he was more and more attracted towards him. Sharat Chandra was caught in the current of his love.

The Master also noticed the spiritual potentiality of the boy at the very first sight and began to give directions and to watch his spiritual development. One day the Master was seated in his room at Dakshineswar surrounded by a group of devotees. Ganesha, the Hindu god of success, was the topic of conversation. The Master praised highly the integrity of character of this deity, his utter absence of passion and single-minded devotion

to his mother, the goddess Durga. Young Sharat was present. Suddenly he said, "Well, sir, I like the character of Ganesha very much. He is my ideal." The Master at once corrected him saying, "No, Ganesha is not your ideal. Your ideal is Shiva. You possess Shiva-attributes." Then he added, "Think of yourself, always, as Shiva and of me as Shakti. I am the ultimate repository of all your powers."

On another occasion the Master asked Sharat, "How would you like to realise God ? What divine visions do you prefer to see in meditation ?" Sharat replied, "I do not want to see any particular form of God in meditation. I want to see Him as manifested in all creatures of the world. I do not like visions." The Master said with a smile, "That is the last word in spiritual attainment. You cannot have it all at once." "But I won't be satisfied with anything short of that," replied the boy, "I shall trudge on in the path of religious practice till that blessed state arrives."

Sharat Chandra had once met Narendra Nath—afterwards Swami Vivekananda—even before he came to Shri Ramakrishna. But at that time Sharat had formed a very wrong impression about one whom afterwards he loved and followed as a leader. Sharat had once gone to see a friend in central Calcutta about whom the report was that he had gone astray. At the house of the friend he met a young man who talked of high things but who seemed to be self-conceited and whose manners were anything but decorous. Sharat came to the conclusion that it was by mixing with this young man that his friend had gone wrong.

A few months after this, Shri Ramakrishna was greatly praising a young man named Narendra Nath. He was

speaking so highly of him that Sharat Chandra felt tempted to have a personal acquaintance with such a person, and got his address from Shri Ramakrishna for this purpose. And what was his wonder when on meeting Narendra Nath, he found that he was none other than the young man whom once he had met at the house of his friend! The first acquaintance soon ripened into close friendship. So great was their attachment to each other that sometimes Sharat and Narendra could be found in the streets of Calcutta, deeply engaged in conversation, till one o'clock in the morning—walking the distance between their homes many times—one intending to escort the other to the latter's home. Sharat Chandra afterwards used to say, "However freely Swamiji (Swami Vivekananda) mixed with us, at the very first meeting I saw that here was one who belonged to a class by himself."

One interesting incident happened when Narendra once went inside the house of Sharat Chandra. It was in the winter of 1884. Sharat and Shashi came to the house of Narendra Nath at noon. Conversation warmed up, and all forgot how time passed. So long Sharat and Shashi had thought that Shri Ramakrishna was only a saint. Now on hearing what Narendra had experienced with Shri Ramakrishna they began to think he was as great as Jesus or any other Prophet of similar rank. In the course of the conversation the day passed into evening. Narendra Nath took them to Cornwallis Square for an evening stroll. There also the conversation continued, broken by a song sung by him. Suddenly, Sharat woke up to the consciousness of time as he heard a clock strike nine at night. Narendra proceeded with them to given them his company for a little distance. But

engaged in talk he came actually to the house of Sharat Chandra, and Sharat requested him to take his meals there. Narendra agreed. But as he entered the house, he stopped in astonishment. It seemed as if he had been in this house before, and knew every corridor, every room there! He wondered if it could be the remembrance of any past life.

The Master was glad beyond measure when he learnt that Sharat Chandra had not only met Narendra Nath, but that a deep love had sprung up between the two. He remarked in his characteristic, homely way. "The mistress of the house knows which cover will go with which cooking utensil."

Sharat passed the First Arts Examination in 1885. His father wanted him to read medicine, specially as he had a pharmacy for which he had to employ a doctor. Though Sharat had no aspiration to be a doctor, on the advice of Narendra Nath he joined the Calcutta Medical College. But destiny willed that Sharat was not to be a medical man. When the Master fell ill, and he was removed to Cossipore, Sharat, along with others, began to serve him there.

Sharat Chandra's father was alarmed at this development. He had, as his family Guru, Jagannath Tarkalankar, a famous pundit and an adept in various kinds of Tantrika practices. Leaving aside such a capable preceptor, should Sharat follow another person! Girish Chandra, Sharat's father, one day took Jagannath Tarkalankar to Shri Ramakrishna at Cossipore. His idea was that in the course of conversation between the family preceptor and Ramakrishna it would transpire what a pigmy the latter was in comparison with the former, and Sharat would clearly see his folly in giving up the

family Guru. But in a moment's talk, an adept like the pundit found that he was in the presence of a blazing fire. Secretly he told Girish that his son should be considered blessed to have such a Guru.

So Sharat continued to serve that Master. His steadfastness in this work was put to the test on the first of January 1886, when the Master in an ecstatic mood blessed many a devotee with a touch which lifted their minds to great spiritual heights. Finding the Master in such a mood of compassion, all who were near-by rushed to the spot to receive his blessings. But Sharat and Latu at that time were engaged in some duty allotted to them. Even the consideration of a spiritual windfall could not tempt them away. Afterwards, when asked as to why he did not go to the Master at that time, Sharat replied, "I did not feel any necessity for that. Why should I? Was not the Master dearer than the dearest to me? Then what doubt was there that he would give me, of his own accord, anything that I needed? So I did not feel the least anxiety."

One day the Master commanded the young disciples to go out and beg their food. They readily obeyed. But with their nice appearance they could hardly hide the fact that they belonged to good families. So when they went out for alms, some were pitied, some were abused, some were treated with utmost sympathy. Sharat Chandra would afterwards narrate his own experience with a smile thus: "I entered a small village and stood before a house uttering the name of God just as the begging monks do. Hearing my call an elderly lady came out and when she saw my strong physique, at once she cried out in great contempt, 'With such a robust health are you not ashamed to live on alms? Why don't you

become a tram conductor at least?' Saying this, she closed the door with a bang."

When, after the passing away of the Master, Sharat returned home, his parents were at rest. But Narendra Nath and others would come to his house now and then and the subject of conversation would be only how to build up life in the light of the message of the Master. At their call Sharat would visit the monastery now and then. This alarmed his father, who reasoned with Sharat, "So long as Shri Ramakrishna was alive, it was all right that you lived with him—nursing and attending on him. But now that he is no more, why not settle down at home?" But seeing that arguments had no effect, he locked his son within a room, so that he might not go and mix with the other young disciples of the Master. Sharat was not perturbed in the least. He began to spend his time in meditation and other spiritual practices. But as chance would have it, a younger brother opened the door of the room out of sympathy for his elder brother, who then came out and fled to the monastery at Baranagore.

During the Christmas of 1886, Narendra and others went to Antpur, the birth-place of Swami Premananda, and there they resolved to lead a life of renunciation. Soon after they formally took Sannyasa, and Sharat became known as Swami Saradananda. His parents came to know of this and visited Baranagore, this time not to dissuade but to give him the complete liberty to follow the line of action he had chosen.

Now began a real life of Tapasya. At Baranagore at dead of night Narendra Nath and Sharat Chandra would secretly go out to the place where the body of the Master was cremated, or to some such spot, and

practise meditation. Sometimes they would spend the whole night in spiritual practices. Though so much inclined towards the meditative life Sharat Chandra was ever ready to respond to the call of work. And with his innate spirit of service he was sure to be found near the sick-bed if any of the brother-disciples fell ill.

Swami Saradananda or Sharat Maharaj, as he was known in the Order, had a sweet musical voice which from a distance could be mistaken for that of a woman. One night some neighbours, led by curiosity as to how a woman could be there at the monastery, scaled the boundary wall and entered the place of music. They were ashamed of themselves after discovering the truth and frankly apologised. When Saradananda read the *Chandi* or recited hymns with his melodious voice, the bystanders felt spiritually uplifted. Afterwards, even in advanced age, he would sing one or two songs, out of overflowing love and devotion, on the occasion of the birthday of Shri Ramakrishna or Swami Vivekananda.

Soon Swami Saradananda began to feel a longing for a life of complete reliance on God. So he went to Puri to practise Tapasya. After returning to Baranagore he started for Varanasi and Ayodhya and at last reached Rishikesh *via* Hardwar. Here he passed some months in Tapasya, till in the summer of 1890 he started for Kedarnath and Badrinarayan via Gangotri with Swami Turiyananda and Vaikuntha Nath Sannyal. This pilgrimage was full of thrilling experiences for them. Some days they had to go without food, some days without shelter. Even on such a difficult journey he was not slow in doing acts of utmost sacrifice. Once on the way they were climbing down a very steep hill with the help of others. The two Gurubhais were ahead, Swami

Saradananda was behind. As Swami Saradananda was climbing down slowly, he found a party behind in which there was an old woman. She found it had to descend as she was without a stick. Swami Saradananda quietly handed his stick to the old lady—following the historic example, "Thy need is greater than mine."

After visiting Kedarnath, Tunganath and Badrinarayan, Swami Saradananda and Vaikuntha Nath came to Almora in July, 1890, and became the guests of Lala Badrinath Shah. Towards August, Swamiji (Swami Vivekananda) and Swami Akhandananda reached Almora, when all of them started for Garhwal. After seeing various places in Garhwal, as they arrived at Tehri, Swami Akhandananda fell ill. As there was no good doctor in the town, he was taken to Dehra Dun. On their way, at Rajpur, below Mussoorie, they met Swami Turiyananda unexpectedly. Swami Turiyananda had separated from Swami Saradananda on the way to Kedarnath and had come here for Tapsya. When Swami Akhandananda was slightly better, he went to Meerut, and Swamiji, Turiyananda, and Saradananda went to Rishikesh, where they heard that Swami Brahmananda was practising Tapasya at Kankhal near Hardwar. So they all went to meet him at Kankhal, where they learnt that Swami Akhandananda was at Meerut. Hence the whole party went to Meerut to have the pleasure of seeing him. At Meerut they all lived together for a few months before they came to Delhi. At Delhi Swamiji left them to wander alone. Then Swami Saradananda came to Varanasi visiting holy places like Mathura, Vrindavan, Allahabad, etc., on the way. At Varanasi Swami Saradananda stayed for some time practising intense medita-

tion. Here an earnest devotee, in search of a Guru, met him and was so much impressed by him that he afterwards took Sannyasa from him. He then became Swami Sachchidananda. In the summer of 1891, Swami Abhedananda met Swami Saradananda at Varanasi, and the two, accompanied by the above-mentioned devotee, made a ceremonial circuit on foot, round the sacred area of the city covering about forty square miles. This caused them so much hardship that all the three were attacked by severe fever. Some time after they had recovered from fever Swami Saradananda got dysentery, which compelled him to return to the monastery at Baranagore in September, 1891.

At Baranagore with better facilities for medical care, Swami Saradananda completely recovered. Then he started for the Holy Mother's native village, Jayrambati, to see her. Although he had a very happy time here, he got malaria and suffered for a long time even after returning to Baranagore.

When Swamiji's work in the West made headway, he was in need of an assistant, and the choice finally fell upon Swami Saradananda. So when Swami Vivekananda came to London for the second time in 1896, he met Swami Saradananda who had arrived there on the 1st of April. Swami Saradananda delivered a few lectures in London, but he was soon sent to New York, where the Vedanta Society had already been established. Soon after his arrival in America he was invited to be one of the teachers at the Greenacre Conference of Comparative Religions. At the close of the Conference, the Swami was invited to lecture in Brooklyn, New York, and Boston. Everywhere his dignity of bearing, gentle courtesy, the readiness to meet questions of all kinds,

and, above all, the spiritual height from which he could talk, won for him a large number of friends, admirers and devotees. Swami Saradananda afterwards settled down in New York to carry on the Vedanta movement in a regular and organised way.

After returning to India, Swamiji started the Ramakrishna Mission Association which was the forerunner of the present Ramakrishna Mission. For this Swamiji wanted an able hand. So he called back Swami Saradananda, who sailed on January 12, 1898, and reached Calcutta early in February, visiting London, Paris, Rome, etc., on the way. In Rome he visited the famous St. Peter's Cathedral. It is said that while visiting it the first time on his way to London two years earlier, he fell into an ecstasy and became oblivious of his surroundings. Does this experience confirm the remark of the Master that he had been a companion of Jesus in a previous incarnation?

Soon after his arrival at the Math, he was made the Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, an office which he ably held to his last day. In addition to his official duty, he also looked after the spiritual well-being of the Math inmates, and he delivered lectures and held religious classes for the benefit of the public.

After a few months, Swami Saradananda started for Kashmir on receipt of a wire from Swamiji who was ill there. On the way Swami Saradananda met with an accident. Between Rawalpindi and Srinagar the horse of the coach by which he was travelling suddenly took fright and started down a hill. When the coach had gone some way down, it struck against a tree, which gave him an opportunity to get out. Just then a boulder fell from above and crushed the horse to death. Swami

Saradananda thus escaped miraculously. What was more surprising was that Swami Saradananda did not lose his equanimity even at such a critical hour.

Similar calmness had been seen in him when, on his voyage to London, his ship was overtaken by a cyclone in the Mediterranean. Everybody in the ship was restless, running up and down in despair of life. Many gave vent to their fear in cries. But Swami Saradananda was the silent spectator of the whole scene.

On another occasion, he was on the Ganga in a country-boat on his way from Calcutta to Belur. A devotee also accompanied him. Soon a severe gale arose and the boat was tossing amidst dashing waves. But Swami Saradananda was calmly smoking a hookah. This composure so much exasperated the devotee that he threw the pipe into the Ganga. To this fury of the devotee he answered only with a kindly smile.

After his recovery at Srinagar Swamiji asked Swami Saradananda to guide some Western disciples in their pilgrimage to the holy places of North India. After this pilgrimage the party reached Calcutta.

On the 7th February 1899, Swami Saradananda along with Swami Turiyananda started for Gujarat for preaching and collecting funds for the Math. After visiting Kanpur, Agra, Jaipur, Ahmedabad, Limbdi, Junagadh, Bhavnagar, etc., they returned to the Math in early May on receiving a wire from Swamiji who planned to start for the West again.

In December of this year he went on pressing invitation to Dacca, Narayangunge, and Barisal. In all places his presence created a great stir. In Barisal he stayed for eight days. Here he delivered three public lectures, but day and night he had to talk with crowds of eager

souls who would come to him to solve their spiritual problems. Ashwini Kumar Datta, the great devotee and political leader of Barisal, was beside himself with joy to have a Gurubhai of Swami Vivekananda and a disciple of Shri Ramakrishna in his town. At Ashwini Kumar's house Swami Saradananda spent most of his time receiving visitors and discussing various problems with them. He returned to the Math at Belur in January 1900.

At this time he undertook the Tantrika form of spiritual practice. Ishwar Chandra Chakravarty, father of Shashi and uncle of Saradananda, was an adept in the cult. He initiated the Swami into its practices. The goal of the Tantrika discipline is the realisation of the Divine Mother in all. That he succeeded in this can be guessed from what he wrote in the dedication of his beautiful Bengali book —*Bharate Shakti Puja* (Mother Worship in India). He writes, "The book is dedicated with great devotion to those by whose grace the author has been blessed with the realisation of the special manifestation of the Divine Mother in every woman on earth."

Swamiji, who returned unexpectedly to Belur in December 1900, after his second visit to the West, was not keeping well. Partly owing to this and partly to the fact that he wanted to see his work progress as quickly as possible during his lifetime, he was now and then very severe in his dealings. During such moods even his brother-disciples, including those on whom he relied most and for whom he had the highest love would not dare approach him. But Swami Saradananda was an exception. His deep calmness could freeze anybody's anger. Seeing this trait in him, Swami Viveka-

nanda used to say jocosely, "Sharat's is the blood of a fish, it will never warm up." Many instances are told as regards the great self-control of Swami Saradananda. Once while the monastery was still at Alambazar, he went to the shrine and found that the place had been made dirty by the footprints of the cook. He very sharply called the cook to him. The poor man came trembling with fear to face, as he thought, an outburst. But immediately the Swami took possession of himself and said, "No, there is nothing, you may go." The patience and power of forgiveness of the Swami were limitless. There were many instances in which the Swami brought round a recalcitrant only by his love and tolerance. Around him lived persons, doing useful work, who were unmanageable anywhere else.

Swamiji passed away on 4th July 1902, and the leadership devolved on Swami Brahmananda, with whom Swami Saradananda co-operated fully in carrying on all the complex and growing works efficiently and successfully.

When Swami Trigunatitananda left for America to take up the work of Swami Turiyananda, the Bengali magazine Udbodhan faced a crisis financially and otherwise. Swami Saradananda now played a decisive part in keeping it alive. A few years later he thought that the *Udbodhan* should have a house of its own. There was need also for a house for the Holy Mother to stay in when she came to Calcutta. So the Swami planned to have a building where downstairs there would be the *Udbodhan* Office, and upstairs would be the shrine and the residence of the Holy Mother. Specially the second reason so much weighed with the Swami, that he started the work by borrowing money on his personal

responsibility in spite of strong opposition from many quarters.

This was a blessing in disguise. For to repay the loan Swami Saradananda had to write *Sri Ramakrishna Lilaprasanga*—discourses on the life of the Master—which has become a classic in Bengali literature. Yet for this great achievement the Swami would not accept the least credit. He would say that the Master had made him the instrument to write this book. The book, in five parts, is still incomplete. When hard pressed to complete the book, the Swami would only say with his usual economy of words, "If the Master wills, he will have it done." One's admiration for the Swami increases a thousandfold, if one knows the circumstances under which such a scholarly book was written. The house in which he lived was crowded. The Holy Mother was staying upstairs, and there was a stream of devotees coming at all hours of the day. There was the exacting duty of the secretaryship of the Ramakrishna Mission. Even in such a situation the Swami would be found absorbed in writing this book—giving a shape to his love and devotion to the Master and the Holy Mother in black and white—oblivious of the surroundings or any other thing in the world.

The "Udbodhan Office" was removed to the new building towards the end of 1908 and the Holy Mother first came there on 23rd May 1909. And what was Swami Saradananda's joy when the Mother came and stayed in the house! For after Swami Yogananda's demise and Swami Trigunatita's departure for the West, Sharat Maharaj felt it his first duty to look after her comfort. To him she was actually the manifestation of the Divine Mother in human form, and he would make no distinc-

tion between her and the Master.

In 1909 a situation arose which showed how courageous this quiet-looking Swami was. Two of those, accused of being revolutionaries connected with the Manicktola Bomb Case—Devavrata Bose and Sachindra Nath Sen—came to join the Ramakrishna Order giving up their political activities. To accept them was to invite the wrath of the police and the Government. But to refuse admission to a sincere spiritual aspirant, simply because of his past conduct, was a sheer act of cowardice. Swami Saradananda accepted them and some other young men—political suspects—as members of the Order. He saw the police chief and other high officials in Calcutta and stood guarantee for these young men, all of whom amply repaid the Swami's trust by their exemplary lives.

Some years later in the Administration Report of the Government of Bengal there was the insinuation that the writings of Swamiji were the source of inspiration behind the revolutionary activities in Bengal. And soon after, Lord Carmichael, the then Governor of Bengal, in his durbar speech at Dacca in 1916 made some remarks with reference to the Ramakrishna Mission, which had a disastrous effect on its activities. To remedy the evil consequences, Swami Saradananda wrote to the Governor and saw the high officials and removed all misconception from their minds about the Mission's activities.

However much he might try to ignore it, Swami Saradananda was passing through a great strain. As a result, he was not keeping well. Amongst other ailments he got rheumatism, for which the doctors advised a change to Puri where sea bathing would do him good.

The Swami went to Puri in March 1913, and returned in July. There also he did not stop his regular work. Throughout his stay at Puri he made it a rule to go to the temple of Jagannath every morning. During the Car Festival it was a sight for the gods to see a fat person like the Swami holding the rope of the Car and pulling it with great enthusiasm and devotion.

At Puri an incident happened which indicated the inborn courtesy and dignity of the Swami. Swami Saradananda with his party put up at "Shashi-niketan", a house belonging to the great devotee, the late Balaram Bose. One evening, the Swami on returning to the house after his usual walk, found that it had been occupied by the Raja of Bundi. This was due to the mistake of a priest-guide of the temple. The Swami could easily have asked the Raja to vacate the house. But to save the Raja as well as the guide from embarrassment the Swami agreed to remove to another house temporarily. Not knowing the real situation, the Private Secretary of the Raja at first showed some *hauteur*. But the reply and attitude of the Swami so much overpowered him, that he soon took the dust off the feet of the Swami as a mark of respect and veneration.

In 1913 there was a great flood in Burdwan. The Ramakrishna Mission started relief work under Swami Saradananda's leadership ; for his heart always bled for the poor and the afflicted. Whenever there was flood or famine the Swami would arrange for raising funds and see that proper workers went to the field of work. This Burdwan relief lasted for many months.

The next year the Swami was attacked by some kidney trouble. The pain was severe, but he bore it with wonderful fortitude. At that time the Holy Mother

stayed upstairs. Lest she should become worried, the Swami would hardly give out that he had been suffering from any pain. Fortunately, after a few days, he came round.

In 1917 Swami Premananda fell ill of Kala-Azar. He stayed at the house of Balaram Bose in Calcutta, and Swami Saradananda supervised all arrangements for his treatment. Soon he had to rush to Puri, because Swami Turiyananda was seriously ill there. Whenever anybody in the Math was ill, Swami Saradananda was sure to be by his bed-side. If he could not make time to attend the case personally, he would make all arrangements for his treatment. But if any emergency arose, the Swami was the person to meet it. A patient does not like to take injection, Swami Saradananda would go there. Sometimes by his very presence the patient would change his mind. A patient was clamouring for some food which would be injurious for him, the Swami in words of extreme love and sympathy, would say he would get the food he wanted, but after some days. The patient like a child would agree. There were instances when even in his busy life he passed the whole night by a sick-bed when the patient was difficult to manage. His sympathy was not limited to the members of the Order alone. Once a devotee fell ill of smallpox and was lying uncared for in a cottage on the Ganga. When the Swami heard of this he immediately went there and after careful nursing for a few days cured the patient.

In his old age, he could not personally attend on the patients. But the same love and sympathy were there. Once in his old days he walked out alone at noon. Feeling anxious as to where he could go and at such an odd hour, his attendant followed him. Soon he attracted

the notice of the Swami, who at first asked him not to come, but at the latter's earnest appeal allowed him to follow. The Swami went to a hotel and, entering a room upstairs, sat by the side of a patient. It was not difficult for the Swami's attendant to understand that the man had tuberculosis. The Swami began to caress the patient lovingly, talking all the while in a tone of greatest sympathy. The patient was careless ; as he talked, sputum fell on all sides. Now he got up, cut some fruits, and offered them to the Swami. While returning, the attendant took the liberty of blaming the Swami for eating there and under such circumstances. The Swami at first remained quiet, and afterwards said, "The Master used to say, 'it will not do you any harm if you take food offered with love and devotion'."

From 1920 onward the Swami sustained such heavy bereavements that he became altogether broken in heart. In 1920 the Holy Mother passed away. And two years later Swami Brahmananda followed her. There were other deaths too. Brother-disciples were passing away. He began to feel lonely in this world. Gradually he began to withdraw his mind from work and to devote greater and greater time to meditation. Those who watched him could easily see that he was preparing for the final exit.

At this time one task which received his most serious attention was the construction of a temple at Jayrambati in sacred memory of the Holy Mother. He would supply money and supervising hands for the work and keep himself acquainted with the minutest details of the construction. He would openly say that after the completion of the temple he would retire from all work. The beautiful temple—emblem of Swami Saradananda's

devotion to the Holy Mother—was dedicated on 19th April 1923.

Another very important work which the Swami did and which will go down to history was the holding of the Ramakrishna Mission Convention at Belur Math in 1926. It was mainly a meeting of the monks of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission centres—about one hundred in number, sprinkled over the whole of India as well as outside India—in order to compare notes and devise future plans of work. Though not keeping very well, he took great interest in it and worked very hard to make it a success. In the Address of Welcome that the Swami delivered at the first session of the Convention he surveyed the past of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission in a sweep, very frankly depicted the present position, and warned the members against the dangers and pitfalls that were lurking in the future. Every new movement passes through three stages—opposition, acceptance, and decline. There is great opposition when a new movement is started. If it has the strength to stand the opposition, the public accepts it and showers praise and admiration. Then comes the real danger for the movement. "For security brings a relaxation of spirits and energy, and a sudden growth of extensity quickly lessens the intensity and unity of purpose that were found among the promoters of the movement." The whole speech was full of fire and vigour. It was like a veteran General's charge to his present army and future unknown soldiers.

After the Convention, the Swami virtually retired from active work, devoting more and more time to meditation. With his ill health, finding him devoted so much to meditation and spiritual practices, the

doctors got alarmed and raised objections. And after all what was the necessity of any further spiritual practices for a soul like Swami Saradananda! But to all protestations the Swami would give simply a loving smile.

It was Saturday, 6th August 1927, Swami Saradananda, as usual, sat in meditation in his room early in the morning. Generally he would be meditating till past noon. But that day he left meditation earlier and entered the shrine. He remained in the shrine for about twenty-five minutes—an unusually long period, and then returned to the door. Again he entered, stood for a few moments near the portrait of the Holy Mother and returned. Thus he did several times. When he finally came out, a great serenity shone through his face. He followed his other routines of the day as usual. In the evening, when the usual service was going on in the shrine, he remained absorbed in thought in his own room. After that an attendant came with some papers. As the Swami stood up to put them inside a chest of drawers, he felt uneasy, his head reeled, as it were. He asked the attendant to prepare some medicine and instructed him to keep the news secret lest it should create unnecessary alarm. These were the last words, and he lay down on the bed. It was a case of apoplexy. The Swami passed away at two in the morning of 19th August.

Swami Saradananda was the living embodiment of the ideal of the Gita in the modern age. To see him was to know how a man can be "Sthitaprajna"—steadfast in wisdom—as taught in the Gita. He was alike in heat and cold, praise and blame, nay, his life was tuned to such a high pitch that he was beyond the reach of

such things. In spite of all his activities, one could tangibly see that his was the case of a Yogi "whose happiness is within, whose relaxation is within, and whose light is within". He harmonised in his life Jnana, Karma, Bhakti, and Yoga, and it was difficult to find out which was less predominant in him. Everyone of these four paths reached the highest perfection in him, as it were.

We find Swami Saradananda mainly in two rôles—as the Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission and as a spiritual personality. As the Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission he was so much in the love and esteem of the workers that his slightest desire was fulfilled with utmost veneration. And this love and esteem was the effect of the Swami's extreme solicitude for their welfare and his unreserved confidence in them. It was very difficult to prejudice him against anybody. And his confidence and trust were never betrayed. He was very democratic in attitude and always kept an open mind. Even to the words of a boy he would listen with great attention and patience. When at any time he found that he had committed a mistake, he would not hesitate to acknowledge it immediately. Once he took a young monk to task for a supposed fault. Afterwards when the Swami knew that the monk was not really at fault, he felt so sorry that he tenderly apologised. Though wielding so much power, he had not the slightest love of power in him. He was humility itself. He felt that anyone might knew better than he. His idea was that everyone was striving after Ultimate Freedom, and that that hankering expressed itself in the love of freedom in daily action. So the Swami would not willingly disturb anybody's freedom.

It must not, however, be forgotten that the secret of his power and influence was his spiritual personality. It was only because spiritually he belonged to a very, very high plane that he could love one and all so unselfishly, remain unmoved in all circumstances and keep his faith in humanity under all trials. It is difficult to gauge the spiritual depth of a person from outside, especially of a soul like Swami Saradananda who would overpower a person by his very presence. This much we know that hundreds of persons would come and look up to him for spiritual solace when they became weary of the world or torn with conflict and affliction. And whoever came in touch with him could not help becoming nobler and spiritually richer. Records in his personal diary show that he had communion with the Divine Mother on many occasions, but more than that people would tangibly feel that here was one whose will was completely identified with the will of God. It was because of this perhaps that one or two words from his lips would remove a heavy burden from many a weary heart. Once an attendant, who felt the touch of his love so much that often he could dare to take liberty with him, asked him what he had attained spiritually. The Swami only replied, "Did we merely vegetate at Dakshineswar?" At another time quite inadvertently he gave out to this attendant that whatever he had written in *Sri Ramakrishna Lilaprasanga* about spiritual things, he had experienced directly in his own life. And in that book he has at places delineated the highest experiences of spiritual life.

But with all his spiritual attainment, the Swami was quite modern in outlook. Those who did not believe or had no interest in religion would find joy in mixing

with him as a very cultured man. He was in touch with all modern thoughts and movements. This aspect of his life drew many to him, who would afterwards be gradually struck by his spirituality.

TEACHINGS

To repeat the Lord's name and to worship Him, no special time and place are necessary. In whatever condition one may be one can take His name.

Through selfless work the mind gets purified. And when the mind becomes pure, there arise knowledge and devotion in it. Knowledge is the very nature of the Self; but being covered with ignorance it is not manifest. The object of selfless work is to remove this ignorance.

First you have to attain knowledge. After attaining knowledge, when one returns to this world of diversity, one will see everything as before, but will no longer be attached to anything in it. After one realizes God, the world seems to be a mere appearance like the mirage. There is nothing in it that can attract one.

What really comes in the spiritual domain is this unswerving faith—faith in the words of the Guru, in the Lord, in the scriptures.

The Master would compare the mind to a packet of mustard seeds, "If the packet is once untied, the seeds get scattered in all directions. How difficult it is to collect them again! Some are perhaps lost for ever." But absolute faith makes the impossible possible.

No man is wholly above defects. But some try to get rid of them, while others do not feel any need for that. Since you have taken refuge at the Lord's feet, you certainly feel the need of eliminating them and have also the will to do so, and the Lord too will grant you the strength for this. We too have taken shelter under

Him and are trying to free ourselves from all shortcomings, that is all. What power have we to do something for somebody? But I always pray whole-heartedly for the good of yourself and all others, and I do so even now.

Whatever work stands in the way of God-realization and increases discontent is bad work. You should wholly discard it.

All souls are ever free, and that is why all minds ever hanker for freedom. A true leader is he who never hampers that craving for attaining freedom, his only concern being to see to it that when the person concerned gets liberty, he does not misuse it.

Brahman and Brahman's power are non-different, like fire and its power of combustion. The scriptures speak of this Brahman as the Cosmic Person (Virat) and the power associated with Him as the Mother of the universe. That is why the presiding deity of Gayatri is sometimes spoken of as the Cosmic person, and sometimes as the Mother of the universe. That is why there is no contradiction in imagining either way.

You complain that thoughts of duties sometimes intrude when you sit for meditation. All minds are in the same predicament. You cannot escape this even if you leave work and retire to a forest. But if through God's grace it becomes firmly impressed on your mind that the world is impermanent, and if the idea that God alone is your true goal takes a grip on your heart, then this kind of unsteadiness of the mind will be greatly eliminated. To have a strong longing for God and feel ill at ease just because God has not been realised are, however, dependent on His grace. Pray to Him for this with all earnestness.

You need not meditate long on your Guru, but just remember and salute him and then spend most of the time in the meditation of your Chosen Deity. Meditate on the Deity as you go on repeating His name. Since past mental tendencies cannot assert themselves during the performance of duties, you should apply your whole mind to them. Selfless work is the best means of winning a victory over past tendencies.

The (Ramakrishna) Mission does not like to express any opinion, good or bad, about political discussions, for the Master did not instruct us to do anything of the kind, and Swamiji asked the Mission to keep itself aloof from such effort. That is why the Mission has been all along engaging itself in spirituality and service to humanity. Since all things are subject to change, therefore the present condition will change some day and political freedom will come. But the Mission does not know and does not care to know how far off is that consummation. The Mission's concern is with how the general public can become strong in spirituality and character. Once the people become possessed of character, spirituality, and strength, they will themselves be able at that time to decide how they will organise their society and conduct the administration of their country.

One must have faith in the enlightened souls and carry on religious practices accordingly. Otherwise it leads nowhere trying to understand the pros and cons of their teachings through our impure minds—occupied as they are with thoughts of the world—and then to carry them out in practice. Hence give up the attempt for understanding everything, and start your spiritual practices by relying on what the Master has taught.

When you sit down for meditation, first think thus: "It is my own Chosen Deity, who like an eternally pure and indivisible ocean of Existence-Knowledge-Bliss, pervades everything and I also exist within Him. It is He who exists everywhere inside and outside myself." Thinking on this idea for a while start your Japa and meditation as usual. This will remove the unsteadiness of the mind.

If the mind continues to be unsteady, pray to the Lord, "Lord, kindly make my mind steady!" Know this for certain that He hears whatever you say, and knows whatever passes in your mind.

Both peace and peacelessness come to us, for the sake of our own experience, according to God's dispensation, but we have to remain steady under all circumstances by holding on to Him. Again, from one point of view, peacelessness appears to be the more welcome, for then one can call on the Lord with greater earnestness.

The greatest sin is to think oneself weak and sinful. If you have to believe anything, believe that you are His children, His part, the heirs to His infinite strength and bliss.

Nowadays there are so many religious societies, but people lose all interest in them after a few days. What is the reason for this? The reason is our words are not in accord with our thoughts. The first step in religion is to be sincere to the core.

Our scriptures say, and we too proclaim that all men are the images of the Lord. But what do we do in practice? We do not scruple to despise sweepers and other low caste people. We treat our women as slaves —those in whom lies dormant the wonderful strength of the Mother of the universe! Only at the time of

worship do we simply utter the words that all women are but images of the Divine Mother!

The four kinds of spiritual practices (Jnana, Yoga, Karma, and Bhakti) are meant for four classes of men. But the aim is the same—to kill the lower self. Think deeply and you will find, there is hardly any difference among them. In fact, there is none. Kill the self and you will be free.

SWAMI SHIVANANDA

Swami Shivananda, more popularly known as Mahapurusha Maharaj, was a personality of great force, rich in distinctive colour and individual quality. His leonine stature and dauntless vigour, his stolid indifference to praise or blame, his spontaneous moods and his profound serenity in times of storm and stress, invested with a singular appropriateness his monastic name which recalls the classical attributes of the great god Shiva.

He was born sometime in the fifties of the nineteenth century on the 11th day of the dark fortnight in the Indian month of Agrahayana (Nov.-Dec.). The exact year of his birth is obscure.[1] The Swami himself with his characteristic indifference to such matters never remembered it. His father had indeed prepared an elaborate horoscope for his son, but the latter threw it away into the Ganga when he chose the life of renunciation.

His early name, before he took orders, was Tarak Nath Ghosal. He came of a respectable and influential family of Barasat. One of his ancestors, Harakrishna Ghosal, was a Dewan of the Krishnanagar Raj. His father, Ramkanai Ghosal, was not only a successful lawyer with a substantial income but a noted Tantrika as well. Much of his earnings was spent in removing the wants of holy men and of poor helpless students. It was not unusual for him to provide board and lodging for twenty-five to thirty students at a time in his

[1] It is inferred that he was born in 1854.

house. Latterly, when he became a deputy collector, his income fell, which forced him to limit his charities much against his wish. Subsequently, he rose to be the assistant Dewan of Cooch Behar.

We have already referred to Ramkanai Ghosal as a great Tantrika, and it will be interesting to recall here an incident which connected him with Shri Ramakrishna. For some time he was legal adviser to Rani Rasmani, the founder of the Kali temple of Dakshineswar, where he came to be acquainted with Shri Ramakrishna during a visit on business matters. Shri Ramakrishna's personality greatly attracted him, and whenever the latter came to Dakshineswar, he never missed seeing him. At one time, during intense spiritual practices, Shri Ramakrishna suffered from an acute burning sensation all over his body, which medicines failed to cure. One day he asked Ramkanai Ghosal if the latter could suggest a remedy. The latter recommended the wearing of his Ishtakavacha (an amulet containing the name of the Chosen Deity) on his arm. This instantly relieved him.

From his early boyhood Tarak showed unmistakable signs of what the future was to unfold. There was something in him which marked him out from his associates. It was not mere bold conduct and straightforward manners. Though a talented boy he showed very little interest in his studies. A vague longing gnawed at his heart and made him forget himself from time to time and be lost in flights of reverie. Early he became drawn to meditative practices. More and more as days went on his mind gravitated towards the vast inner world of spirit. Often in the midst of play and laughter and boyish merriment he would suddenly

be seized by an austere and grave mood which filled his companions with awe and wonder. It is not surprising that his studies did not extend beyond school. Tarak like scores of other young men was drawn to the Brahmo Samaj, thanks to the influence of Keshab Chandra Sen. And though he continued his visits to the Samaj for some time, his hunger was hardly satisfied with what he got there.

Meanwhile his father's earnings fell, and Tarak had to look for a job. He went to Delhi. There he used to spend hours in discussing religious subjects in the house of a friend named Prasanna. One day he asked the latter about Samadhi, to which Prasanna replied that Samadhi was a very rare phenomenon which very few experienced, but that he knew at least one person who had certainly experienced it and mentioned the name of Shri Ramakrishna. At last Tarak heard about one who could teach him what he wanted to know. He waited patiently for the day when he would be able to meet Shri Ramakrishna.

Not long after, Tarak returned to Calcutta and accepted a job in the firm of Messrs. Mackinnon Mackenzie and Co. He was still continuing his visits to the Brahmo Samaj. About this time, he lived in a house near that of Ram Chandra Datta. One day at the end of 1880 he heard that Shri Ramakrishna would come to Ram Chandra's house on a visit. He decided to seize the opportunity of meeting him on the occasion. When the long-desired evening came, he went to Ram Babu's house where he found Shri Ramakrishna talking in a semi-conscious state to an audience in a crowded room. Tarak hung on his words. He had long been eager to hear about Samadhi, and what was his surprise

when he found from the few words he caught that the Master had been talking on the very subject that day. He was beside himself with joy. He left the room quietly some time after. It had made a profound impression upon him. Tarak began to feel an irresistible attraction for Shri Ramakrishna and resolved to meet him the next Saturday at Dakshineswar.

At that time Tarak did not know much about Dakshineswar. He, however, managed to reach the place in the company of a friend. The evening service was about to begin when he arrived. Tarak entered the paved courtyard and began to look for Shri Ramakrishna. Coming to his room he found him seated there. Tarak was overpowered with a deep feeling as soon as he saw him. He felt as if it was his own mother who was sitting yonder in front of him. After the usual preliminary inquiries the Master asked if he had seen him the previous Saturday in the house of Ram Chandra. Tarak replied in the affirmative. "In what do you believe," asked the Master, "in God with form or without form?" "In God without form", replied Tarak. "You can't but admit the Divine Shakti also," said the Master. Soon he proceeded towards the Kali temple and asked the young man to follow him. The evening service was going on with the accompaniment of delightful music. Coming to the temple the Master prostrated himself before the image of the Mother. Tarak at first hesitated to follow the example, because, according to the ideas of the Brahmo Samaj which he frequented, the image was no more than inert stone. But suddenly the thought flashed in his mind: "Why should I have such petty ideas? I hear God is omnipresent, He dwells everywhere. Then He must be

present in the stone image as well." No sooner had the idea flashed in his mind than he prostrated himself before the image.

The Master's practised eye judged at sight the new-comer's mettle. He repeatedly asked him to stay overnight. "Stay here tonight," he said, "you can't gain any lasting advantage by the chance visit of a day. You must come here often." Tarak begged to be excused as he had already decided to stay with his friend. When he came again, the Master asked him for some ice. Not knowing how to get it, Tarak spoke of it to a friend who was acquainted with Surendra, a householder devotee of the Master, and the latter procured some and sent it to the Master.

From that time on Tarak began to visit Dakshineswar frequently. His intimacy with the Master deepened. One day the Master asked Tarak, "Look here, I don't ordinarily inquire the whereabouts of anyone who comes here. I only look into his heart and read his feelings. But the very sight of you has made me realise that you belong to this place, and I feel a desire to know something about your father and people at home." He was agreeably surprised to learn that Ramkanai Ghosal was his father, and telling of the service the latter had done him, wished that he might see him again. Some time later Ramkanai Ghosal went to Dakshineswar and prostrated himself before Shri Ramakrishna, who placed his foot on his head and entered into Samadhi. Ramkanai eagerly grasped the Master's feet and burst into tears.

One day—it was probably Tarak's third or fourth visit to Dakshineswar—the Master took him aside and asked him to put out his tongue. Then he wrote some-

thing on it. It had a strange effect upon Tarak. He felt an overpowering feeling taking hold of him. The vast world of sense melted before his eyes, his mind was drawn deep within, and his whole being became absorbed in a trance. This happened twice again, once in the presence of Swami Brahmananda.

Association with the Master sharpened Tarak's hunger for religious experiences. Long afterwards he described the state of his mind at that period in the following words: "I often felt inclined to cry in the presence of the Master. One night I wept profusely in front of the Kali temple. The Master was anxious at my absence and when I went to him he said, 'God favours those who weep for Him. Tears thus shed wash away the sins of former births.' Another day I was meditating at the Panchavati when the Master came near. No sooner had he cast his glance at me than I burst into tears. He stood still without uttering a word. A sort of creeping sensation passed through me, and I began to tremble all over. The Master congratulated me on attaining this state and said it was the outcome of divine emotion. He then took me to his room and gave me something to eat. He could arouse the latent spiritual powers of a devotee at a mere glance."

From the very first meeting with Shri Ramakrishna, Tarak felt in his inmost heart that he had at last found one who could guide his steps to the doors of the Infinite. Intuitively he felt that the vague aspirations of his boyhood and youth were realised in the personality of the Master, who appeared to him to be the consummation of all religions. To know him was to know God. With the growth of this conviction his

devotion to the Master increased a hundredfold. The Master also made him his own by his immeasurable love. Tarak felt that parental love was as nothing in comparison. In a letter to an inquirer towards the end of his life he wrote about the Master, "I have not yet come to a final understanding whether he was a man or superman, a god or God Himself. But I have known him to be a man of complete self-effacement, master of the highest renunciation, possessed of supreme wisdom, and the very incarnation of love ; and, as with the passing of days I am getting better and better acquainted with the domain of spirituality and feeling the infinite extent and depth of Shri Ramakrishna's spiritual moods, the conviction is growing in me that to compare him with God, as God is popularly understood, would be minimising and lowering his supreme greatness. I have seen him showering his love equally on men and women, on the learned and the ignorant, and on saints and sinners, and evincing earnest and unceasing solicitude for the relief of their misery and for their attainment of infinite peace by realising the Divine. And I dare say that the world has not seen another man of his type in modern times so devoted to the welfare of mankind."

While Tarak was still in service, his father was forced through poverty to agree to giving Tarak's sister Nirada in marriage to a family from which he would accept a a girl as Tarak's bride. Much as Tarak disliked the idea, he was compelled to marry for the sake of his sister. He had resolved not to live a worldly life ; but before he actually renounced the world, he opened his heart fully to the Master, who said, "Why should you be afraid? For I am there to help you. You have of

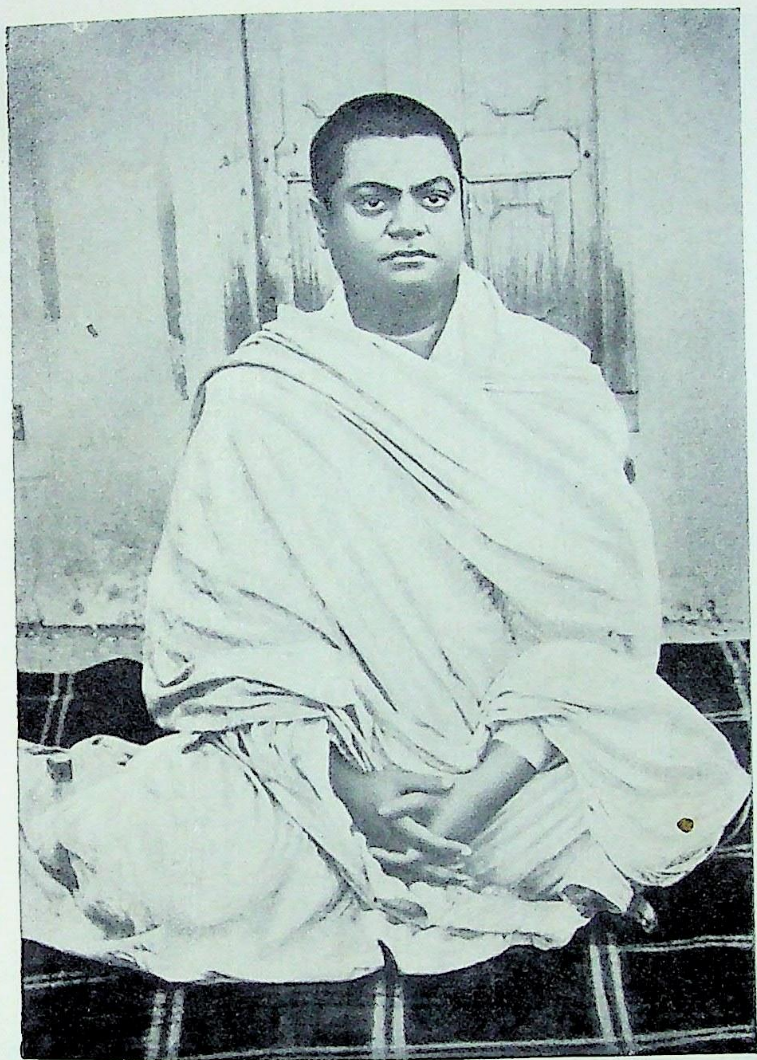
course to look after your wife so long as she lives. Have a little patience, and the Mother will settle everything." Tarak followed the Master's advice; he earned for his wife, but avoided all other relationship with her. That he was successful in this endeavour is evident from a letter which he wrote in his old age to Romain Rolland. There Swami Shivananda declares that he led an absolutely pure life of unbroken celibacy. Tragic as the event was, Tarak's wife did not live long after his meeting with the Master. Tarak's purity and prayer, Shri Ramakrishna's advice and encouragement and the grace of all-merciful Providence did not allow him to fall a victim to the snares of the world. The perfect purity of his married life earned for him the popular name of Mahapurusha from the great Swami Vivekananda.

The wife's death removed the only obstacle in the path of renouncing the world. With this end in view Tarak went to his father to bid him farewell. At this proposal, the father became deeply moved and tears began to stream down his face. He asked Tarak to go to the family shrine and to make prostration there. Then the father, placing his hand on his son's head, blessed him saying, "May you realise God. I have tried very hard myself. I even thought of renouncing the world, but that was not to be. I bless you, therefore, that you may find God." Tarak related all this to the Master, who was much pleased and expressed his hearty approval. With the Master's consent, the monk Tarak now lived sometimes in an outer room of Ram Chandra Datta and sometimes at the Kankurgachi Yogodyan, begging for his food and cooking it with his own hand.

Tarak continued his visits to Dakshineswar till the

Master fell seriously ill in 1885, which necessitated his removal first to Calcutta and then to the Cossipore garden-house. All these years the Master had been quietly shaping the character of his disciples, instructing them not only in religious matters, but also in the everyday duties of life. Cossipore, however, formed the most decisive period in their lives. Here Tarak joined the group of young brother-disciples—Narendra, Rakhal, Baburam, Yogin, Niranjan, Sharat, Shashi, Latu, Kali, Gopal (senior) and Gopal (junior) to serve and attend on the Master during his illness. Service to the Master and loyalty to common ideals forged an indissoluble bond of unity among these young aspirants. Much of their time was devoted to discussions on religious subjects. All this set ablaze the great fire of renunciation smouldering in them, and they yearned for realisation.

One incident during this period is worth recounting. Narendra, Tarak, and Kali were at this time very much engaged in the thought of Buddha and of Brahman without any quality. Impelled by this they went for Tapasya to Bodh Gaya. As they sat in meditation under the Bodhi tree, lost to outer consciousness, Narendra suddenly began to weep and then held Tarak in a warm embrace. According to one version, Narendra Nath, deep in the thought of Buddha's compassion, was seized with such an emotional upsurge that he could not help embracing his brother out of overflowing love. Or perhaps, Narendra saw something of Buddha in Tarak. At least Kali affirmed that he heard from Narendra that the latter saw a light flash out of Buddha's image and proceed towards Tarak. The Master too seems to have had a similar estimation of Tarak's core of personality. About this estimation, we



Swami Vivekananda



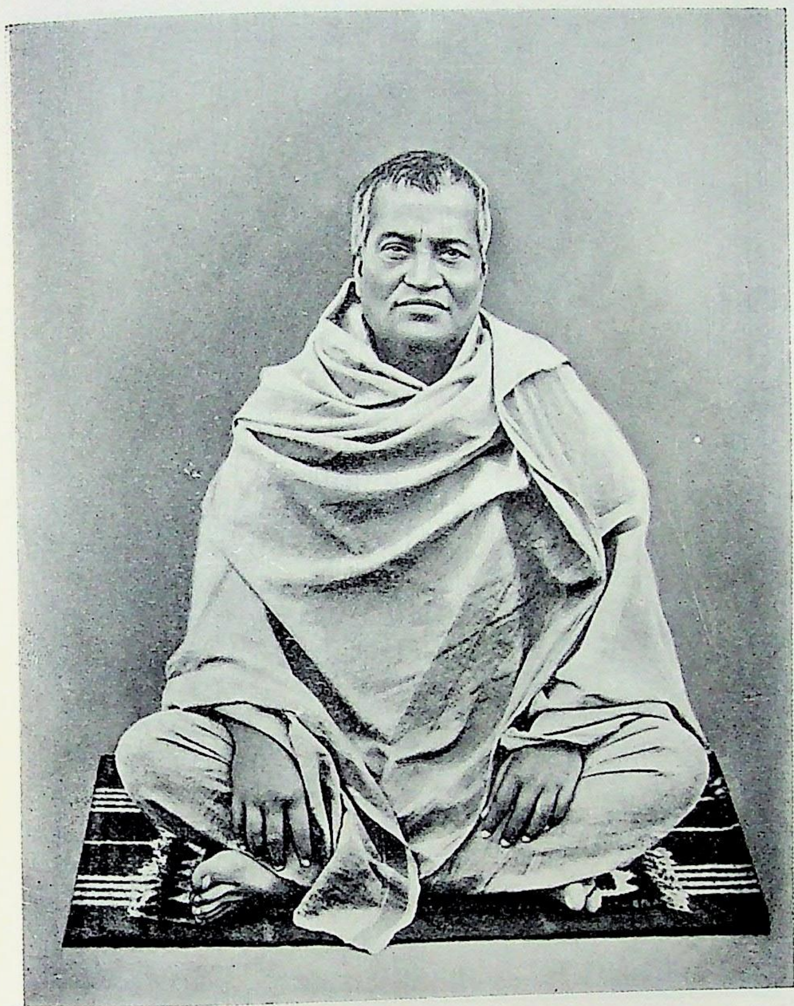
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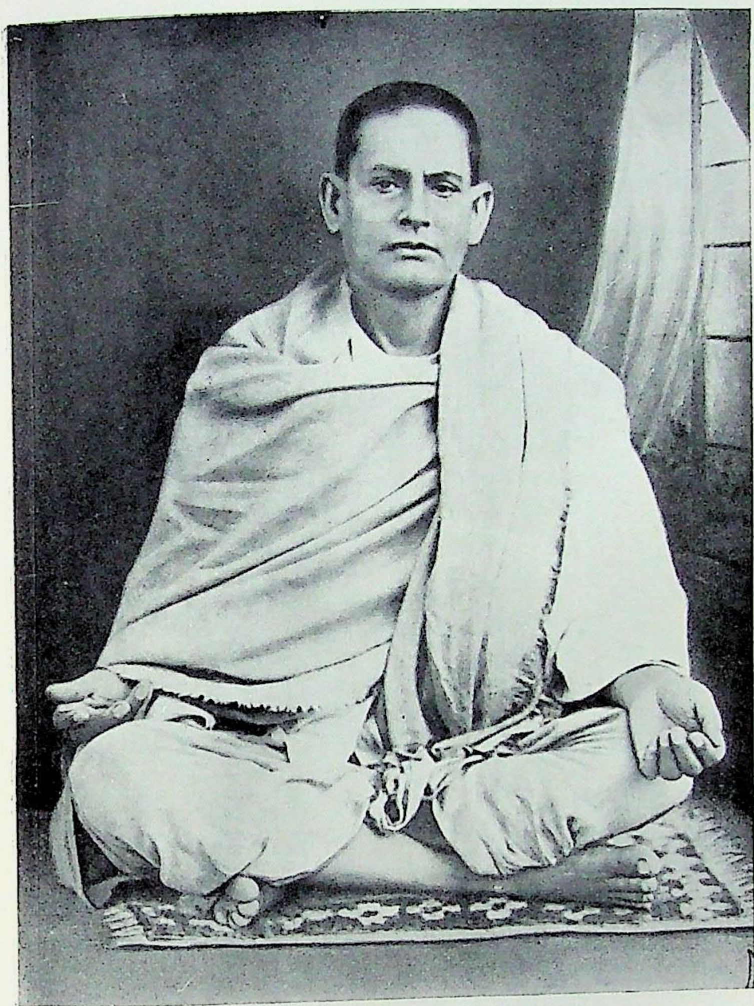
Swami Saradananda



Swami Shivananda



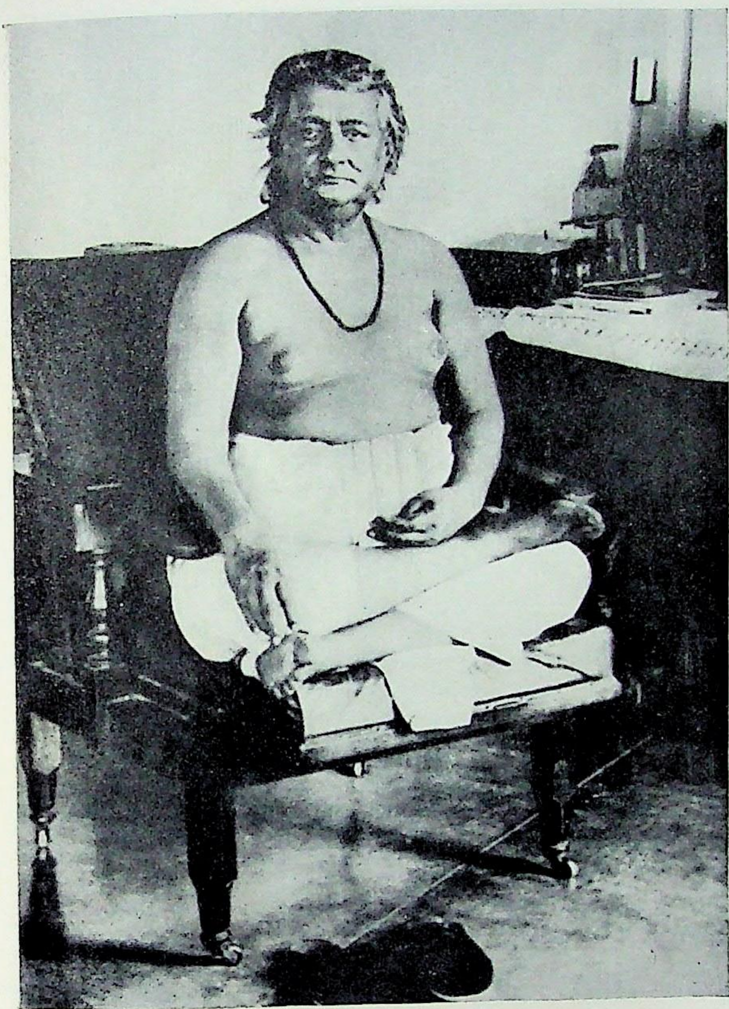
Swami Ramakrishnananda



Swami Premananda



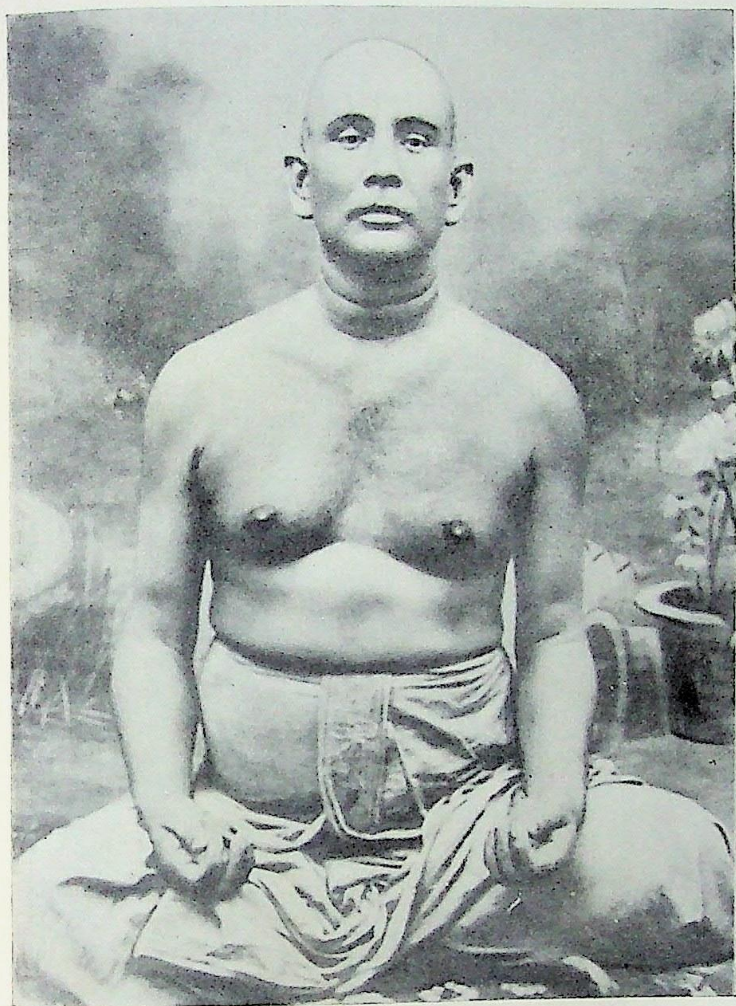
Swami Yogananda



Swami Akhandananda



Swami Trigunatitananda



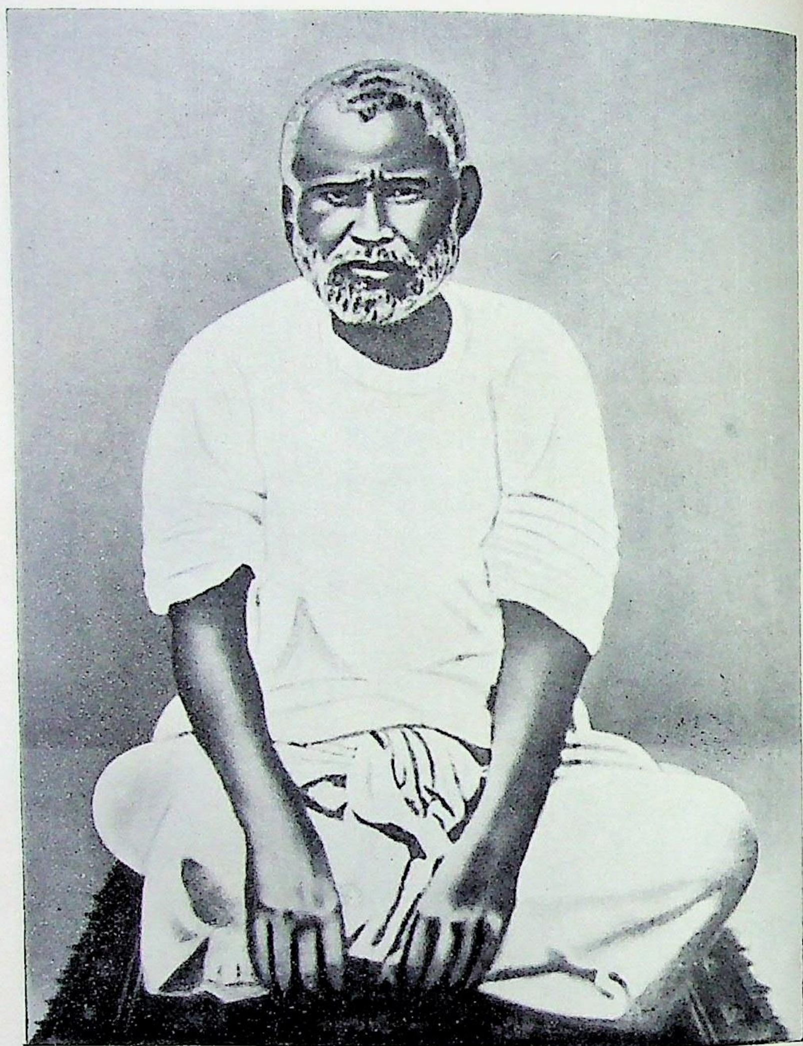
Swami Turiyananda



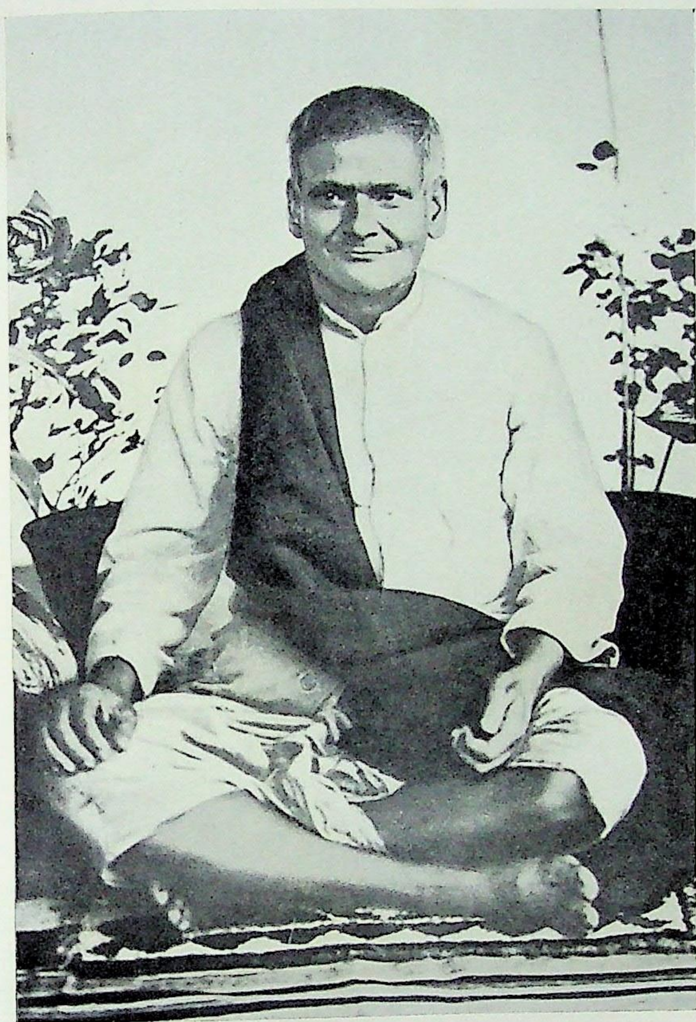
Swami Advaitananda



Swami Abhedananda



Swami Adbhutananda



Swami Subodhananda



Swami Vijnanananda

have it on the evidence of Swami Turiyananda, that one day when Tarak was returning from the Kali temple, the Master remarked, "His 'home' is that high Power from which proceed name and form." Tarak had something of the Transcendental Verity in him. And Buddha, it must be remembered, was not an atheist, but an embodiment of the Upanishadic ideal.

After the passing away of the Master, the small group of disciples clustered round the monastery of Baranagore. The first to come was Tarak, with whom soon joined Gopalda, Kali, and others. The Master's death had created a great void in the hearts of the disciples, who began to spend most of their time in intense meditation in order to feel the living presence of the Master. Often they would leave the monastery and wander from place to place, away from crowded localities and familiar faces. This period of their lives, which stretched over a number of years and which was packed with severe austerities and great miracles of faith, out of the mighty fire of which was forged the powerful characters the world later saw, is mostly a sealed book. Towards the end of his life, Swami Shivananda, the name received by Tarak when he became a monk, one day chanced to lift a corner of the pall of mystery which lay over these stormy years. "Often it happened", he said, "that I had only one piece of cloth to cover myself with. I used to wear half of it and wrap the other half round the upper part of my body. In those days of wandering I would often bathe in the water of wells, and then I used to wear a piece of loin-cloth and let my only piece of cloth dry. Many a night I slept under trees. At that time the spirit of renunciation was aflame and the idea of bodily comfort never entered the mind.

Though I travelled mostly without means, thanks to the grace of the Lord, I never fell into danger. The Master's living presence used to protect me always. Often I did not know where the next meal would come from. ... At that period a deep dissatisfaction gnawed within, and the heart yearned for God. The company of men repelled me. I used to avoid roads generally used. At the approach of night I would find some suitable place just to lay my head on and pass the night alone with my thoughts."

Some indication of Tarak's bent of mind at this period can be had from a few reminiscences which have come down to us. He had a natural slant towards the orthodox and austere path of knowledge which placed little value on popular religious attitudes. He avoided ceremonious observances and disregarded emotional approaches to religion. He keyed up his mind to the formless aspect of the Divine. This stern devotion to Jnana continued for some time. Deep down in his heart, however, lay his boundless love for the Master which nothing could affect for a moment. In later years, with the broadening of experience, his heart opened to the infinite beauties of spiritual emotion.

During his days of itineracy Swami Shivananda, known as Mahapurushaji popularly among his disciples, visited various places in North India. In the course of these travels he also went to Almora where he became acquainted with a rich man of the place named Lala Badrilal Shah, who speedily became a great admirer of the disciples of Shri Ramakrishna and took great care of them whenever he happened to meet them. Here, towards the latter part of 1893, the year of

Swamiji's journey to the West, Tarak met Mr. E. T. Sturdy, an Englishman interested in Theosophy. Mahapurushaji's personality and talks greatly attracted him. Mr. Sturdy came to hear of Swamiji's activities in the West from him, and on his return to England he invited Swamiji there and made arrangements for the preaching of Vedanta in England.

With the return of Swamiji from the West in 1897, Mahapurusha's days of itineracy came to an end. He went to Madura to receive Swamiji, and returned with him to Calcutta. In the same year, at the request of Swamiji, he went to Ceylon and preached Vedanta for about eight months. There he used to hold classes on the Gita, and the *Raja Yoga,* which became popular with the local educated community including a number of Europeans. One of his students, Mrs. Picket, to whom he gave the name of Haripriya, was specially trained by him so as to qualify her to teach Vedanta to the Europeans. She later went to Australia and New Zealand at the direction of the Swami and succeeded in attracting interested students in both the countries. He returned to the Math in 1898, which was then housed at Nilambar Babu's garden.

In 1899 plague broke out in an epidemic form in Calcutta. Swami Vivekananda asked Swami Shivananda and others to organise relief work for the sick. The latter put forth his best efforts without the least thought for his personal safety. About this time a landslip did considerable damage to property at Darjeeling, and Mahapurushaji also collected some money for helping those who were affected by it.

The natural drive of his mind was, however, for a life of contemplation, and so he went again to the

Himalayas to taste once more the delight and peace of meditation. Here he spent some years, although he would occasionally come down to the Math for a visit. About this time Swamiji asked him to found a monastery in the Himalayas. Although this desire could not be realised at the time, Swami Shivananda remembered his wish and years afterwards, in 1915, he laid the beginnings of a monastery at Almora, which was completed by Swami Turiyananda with his co-operation.

In 1900 he accompanied Swami Vivekananda on the latter's visit to Mayavati. While returning to the plains Swamiji left him at Pilibhit with a request that he should collect funds for the maintenance and improvement of the Belur Math. He stayed back and raised some money.

Shortly before Swamiji passed away, the Raja of Bhinga gave him Rs. 500 for preaching Vedanta. Swamiji handed the money over to Swami Shivananda asking him to start an Ashrama with it at Varanasi, which he did in 1902.

The seven long years which he spent at this Varanasi Ashrama formed a memorable chapter of his life. Outwardly, of course, there was no spectacular achievement. The Ashrama grew up, not so much as a centre of great social activity, but as a school of hard discipline and rigorous Tapasya for the development of individual character as in the hermitages of old. Here we are confronted with an almost insurmountable obstacle in the way of presenting the life-story of spiritual geniuses. The most active period of their lives is devoid of events in popular estimation. It is hidden away from the public eye and spent in producing those invisible and intangible commodities whose value cannot be measured

in terms of material goods. When they appear again, they are centres of great and silent forces which often leave their imprint on centuries. Realisation of God is not an event in the sense in which the discovery of a star or an element is an event, which resounds through all the continents. But one who has solved the riddle of life is a far greater benefactor of humanity than, say, the discoverer of high scientific truths.

Anxious times were ahead for Swami Shivananda; the funds of the Varanasi Ashrama were soon depleted. At times nobody knew wherefrom the expenses of the day would come. Mahapurushaji, however, carried on unruffled and the clouds lifted after a while. Most of his time was spent in intense spiritual practices. He would scarcely stir out of the Ashrama, and day and night he would be in a high spiritual mood. The life in the Ashrama was one of severe discipline and hardship. The inmates hardly enjoyed full meals for months, and there was not much clothing to lessen the severity of the winter. He himself used to pass most of the nights on a small bench. In the winter months he would usually get up at about three in the morning and light a Dhuni fire in one of the rooms, before which they would sit for meditation, which often continued far into the morning. During these times Swami Saradananda, the then Secretary of the Mission, would press him hard to try to collect funds for the local Home of Service and would say jocosely, "Will mere meditation bring money?" But the Swami could not be moved from the tenor of his life.

For some time he opened a school at the Ashrama, where he himself taught English to a group of local boys. About this time he translated Swami Viveka-

nanda's Chicago lectures into Hindusthani so that Swamiji's ideas might spread among the people. He continued to look after the affairs of the Ashrama till 1909, when he returned to Belur and lived there for some time. In 1910 he went on a pilgrimage to Amarnath in company with Swami Turiyananda and Swami Premananda. On his return he fell seriously ill with dysentery, which proved very obstinate. He became specially careful as regards food after this and began to observe a strict regimen, which continued till the end and to which his long life was in no small measure due.

In 1910 he was elected Vice-President of the Ramakrishna Mission. In 1917 Swami Premananda who used to manage the affairs of the Math at Belur fell seriously ill, and his duties came to rest on the shoulders of Swami Shivananda. And in 1922, after the passing away of Swami Brahmananda, he was made the President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, in which post he continued till the end of his life. Shortly before this, he had been to Dacca and Mymensingh in response to an invitation. This tour started a new phase in his long career which has left a very profound impression upon all who came in contact with him during this period. Large crowds flocked to him at places in Dacca and Mymensingh to hear him talk on spiritual matters, and for the first time he began to initiate persons into spiritual life at the earnest appeal of several devotees, though at first he was much against it.

In 1924 and 1927 he went on two long tours to the South, during which he formally opened the centres at Bombay, Nagpur, and Ootacamund and initiated a

large number of persons into religious life. The hill station of Ootacamund appealed to him greatly, and here he spent some time in a high spiritual mood. In 1925 during the winter he went to Deoghar accompanied by a large number of monks from the Belur Math to open the first buildings of the local Ramakrishna Mission. He stayed there for a little over three weeks which was a period of unalloyed joy and bliss for all who happened to be there. Wherever he went he carried an atmosphere of delight around him. Monks and devotees thronged round him morning and evening, and for hours the conversations on spiritual subjects continued. Two incidents at Deoghar and Ootacamund are worth recounting here.

During his stay at Deoghar, he had a severe attack of asthma, which compelled him to spend the night in a sitting posture. As the suffering was intense and he felt like dying, he concentrated his mind on the Indwelling Self and became immediately oblivious of pain. When relating the incident the next day, he said, "As it was the meditation of a mature age, the mind soon dived inward", and he pointed to his chest. "What is that, sir?" inquired a listener. "That indeed is the Self", replied the Swami. The Ootacamund hills had a spiritual tranquillity which easily lifted his mind to a higher level of experience. As he sat one day looking out at the blue hills spreading in front like the waves of a sea, he felt as though something emerged out of his body, spread all over the landscape, and became identified with all that existed. Did he realise God there in His cosmic form (Virat)?

After 1930 his health broke down greatly, though he could still take short walks. What a cataract of disas-

ters had come upon him since 1927—loss of the comrades of old days one after another, trouble and defections, illness and physical disabilities! But nothing could for a moment dim the brightness of his burning flame of reliance on God. They only brought into high relief the greatness of his spiritual qualities. At night, after meals, he would usually pass an hour or so all alone, except for the presence of an attendant or two who used to be near. And whenever he was alone he seemed to be immersed in a profound spiritual mood. He would occasionally break the silence by gently uttering the Master's name. The mood would recur whenever in the midst of an almost uninterrupted flow of visitors and devotees he found a little time to himself. In the midst of terrible physical suffering he would radiate joy and peace all round. Not once did anyone hear him utter a syllable of complaint against the torments which assailed the flesh. To all inquiries about his health his favourite reply was, "Janaki (i.e. Sita) is all right so long she is able to take the name of Rama." Physicians who came to treat him were amazed at his buoyant spirits which nothing could depress. Sometimes he would point to his pet dog and say, "That fellow's master is here (pointing to himself)" and then pointing one finger to himself and another to the Master's shrine he would add, "and this fellow is His dog".

Age, which diminishes our physical and mental vigour, serves only to heighten the force and charm of a spiritual personality. The last years of Swami Shivananda's life were days of the real majesty of a spiritual sovereign. The assumption of the vast spiritual responsibilities of the great office tore off the austere mask of reserve and rugged taciturnity which so long hid his

tender heart and broad sympathy. All these years thousands upon thousands came to him, men and women, young and old, rich and poor, high and low, the homeless and the outcast, men battered by fate and reeling under the thousand and one miseries to which man is prey, and went back lifted up in spirits. A kind look, a cheering word, and an impalpable something which was nevertheless most real, put new hope and energy into persons whose lives had almost been blasted away by frustrations and despair. He cheerfully bore all discomfort and hardship in the service of the helpless and the needy. Even during the last illness which deprived him of the power of speech and half of his limbs, the same anxiety to be of help to all was plain, and his kindly look and the gentle movement of his left hand in blessing, and, above all, his holy presence did more to brace up their drooping spirits than countless words contained in books could ever do.

During his term of office the work of the Mission steadily expanded. The ideas of the Master spread to new lands, and centres were opened not only in different parts of India, but also in various foreign countries. He was, however, no sectarian with limited sympathy. All kinds of work, social, national, or religious, received his blessings. Labourers in different fields came to him and went away heartened by words of cheer and sympathy. His love was too broad to be limited by sectional interests ; it extended to every place and to every movement where good was being done. Are not all who toil for freedom and justice, for moral and religious values, for the removal of human want and suffering, for raising the material and cultural level of the masses, doing the Master's work? He was no mere re-

cluse living away from human interests and aspirations, away from the currents of everyday life. His was an essentially modern mind keenly aware of the suffering of the poor and the downtrodden. His clear reason unbefogged by sectional interests could grasp the truth behind all movements for making the lot of the common man happy and cheerful. When the Madras Council was considering the Religious Endowment Bill which aimed at a better management of the finance of the religious Maths, the Mohunt of a Math in Madras approached him seeking his help for fighting the measure because it touched the vested interests. But the Swami told him point-blank that a monastery should not simply hoard money, but should see that it comes to the use of society. When news of flood and famine reached him, he became anxious for the helpless victims and would not rest till relief had been organised.

One day he was invited for meal at a devotee's house in Madras. When resting after food he was roused by some noise downstairs, and looking through the window he found some poor people gathering together the food in the leaves thrown down after the guests had been satisfied. Being much moved by the sight, the Swami asked the devotee to feed them properly, and he remarked, "India has no hope till she atones for this accumulated sin." Mahapurushaji naturally avoided politics. But he was full of admiration for the spirit of renunciation and service that inspired some of the outstanding patriots. About Mahatma Gandhi, for instance, he said, "The patriotism of Swamiji has taken possession of Gandhiji. All should imitate Gandhi's character. There will be some hope of peace only when

such people are born in every country."

Full of praise though he was of the heroic efforts of the Mahatma and his followers, Mahapurushaji never for a moment deviated from the path of spirituality chalked out by Swamiji. Thus when in the heyday of Mahatmaji's non-co-operation movement, some Bengali leaders felt that the Ramakrishna Mission should take an active part in politics, that being according to them the inner core of Swamiji's teachings, and when, under such an impression, some people warned Mahapurushaji that the Mission was inviting disaster by thus standing aloof from the national movement, Mahapurushaji calmly told them that the path of national salvation lay through the formation of character on a spiritual basis. That was the real message of Swamiji. Others might follow the path they considered best, but the Mission could not give up its ideals for gaining any temporary advantage. In fact he spoke as a true son of the Master was expected to speak.

Though all kinds of good work found him sympathetic, he never failed to stress the spirit which should be at the back of all activities. One who witnesses the drama of life from the summit of realisation views its acts in a light denied to common understanding. Our toils and strivings, our joys and delights, our woes and tears are seen in their true proportion from the vast perspective of the Eternal. Work yoked to true understanding is a means for the unfoldment of the divine within man. So his advice was always: Behind work there should be meditation ; without meditation, work cannot be performed in a way which conduces to spiritual growth. Nor is work nicely performed without having a spiritual background. He would say, "Fill

your mind in the morning so much with the thoughts of God that one point of the compass of your mind will always be towards God though you are engaged in various distracting activities."

His own life was a commentary on what he preached. Though he soared on the heights of spiritual wisdom he was to the last rigid in attending to the customary devotions for which he had scarcely any need for himself. Until the time he was too weak to go out of his room, every dawn found him in the shrine room meditating at a fixed hour. In the evening, perhaps, he would be talking to a group of people when the bell for evening service rang. He would at once become silent and lost in deep contemplation, while those who sat round him found their minds stilled and they enjoyed a state of tranquillity which comes only from deep meditation.

Not only did his life stand out as the fulfilment of the ideal aspirations of the devotee, as an ever-present source of inspiration, but his kindness and pity issued forth in a thousand channels to the afflicted and the destitute. Not all who came to him were in urgent need of spiritual comfort. Empty stomachs and naked bodies made them far more conscious of their physical wants than of the higher needs of the soul. His charities flowed in a steady stream to scores of persons groaning under poverty. Perhaps there came to him one whose daughter had fallen seriously ill, but who did not know how to provide the expenses for her treatment. There was another who had lost his job and stared helplessly at the future. Such petitions and their fulfilment were an almost regular occurrence during his last years, not to mention his constant gifts of cloths and blankets, etc., to hundreds of people.

His love for the Master, his monastery, and his devotees knew no bounds. His doors remained ever open to the monks and devotees, and so long as it was physically possible for him, he moved about the monastery grounds looking after everything and inquiring about everybody. The cowshed, the kitchen, the dispensary—in fact everything belonging to the Master got his fullest attention. His special care was of course for the shrine room. Everyday he inquired about the offerings to be made to Shri Ramakrishna. When any devotee brought fruits or flowers for himself, he insisted on those being first offered to the Master. The first duty for anyone entering the monastery was to offer his salutation at the shrine.

In the days of his physical decline, the grand old man, whom illness had confined to bed, was like a great patriarch, a paterfamilias, affectionately watching over the welfare of his vast brood. His love showed itself in a hundred ways. If anyone of his numerous devotees or members of the monastery fell sick, he never failed to make anxious inquiries about him. If any of the devotees did not turn up on the usual day at the Math, it never failed to attract his notice. And when the devotees came to the Math, even their petty needs and comforts engaged his attention. But very few of them came to know of this.

His numerous children, who felt secure in his affectionate care, went about their duties full of the delight of living. One night, after the meal, some of the members of the monastery at Belur were making fun and laughing loudly in the inner verandah of the ground floor of the main Math building. The noise of laughter rose up and could be heard in Mahapurushaji's

room. He smiled a little at this and said softly: "The boys are laughing much and seem to be happy. They have left their hearth and home in search of bliss. Master! Make them blissful." What an amount of feeling lay behind these few tender words of prayer!

His health, which was already shattered, broke down still more and beyond recovery in May, 1933, when he had an attack of apoplexy, which deprived him of the use of half of his body including speech. He passed away on February 20, 1934, leaving a memory which is like a golden dream flung suddenly from one knows not where into this harsh world of reality.

The real is that which is an object of experience. To Swami Shivananda God and religion were not vague words or distant ideals, but living realities. Lives like his light up the dark recesses of history and point to the divine goal towards which humanity is travelling with growing knowledge.

It is only by doing selfless work that the mind gets purified. And when the mind is purified, even the slightest suggestion would fill your heart with devotion for the Lord. If the mind be not purified, you may practise Japa to any extent, nothing will result by way of spiritual progress. What can Japa do if the mind is full of selfishness, jealousy, hatred, etc.? It is because the country is engrossed in Tamas (inertia) that Swamiji has prescribed work as a means to raise it up. You talk of patriotism. What else can be greater patriotism than this love for the poor and being of service to them?

If one practises meditation and Japa regularly along with work, then there will be no trouble. We have to work, that is certain. But then if one does not practise meditation, Japa, etc. along with work, then one will not be able to work in the right spirit. The whole trouble is about "me and mine", which always seeks comfort. Meditation and Japa are absolutely necessary —there should be no lapse in them. When you meditate, think that you and He alone exist, and forget everything else—work, (monastic) Order, Math, etc. Gradually you have to forget even your own existence. If work makes the mind impure, it is not good work, but an evil one.

The right kind of service is possible only when one sees God in the person served. But it is difficult to have this knowledge at the outset. So, to start with, one has to depend on the word of one's Guru, and take them on faith. We must have faith in Swamiji, who has

propounded this doctrine of service. The Master's life is the aphorism, as it were, and Swamiji's is the commentary on it. Swamiji formulated this doctrine of service, seeing God in everything, from several incidents in the Master's life.

One has to meditate on the different centres in the Sushumna (the nerve current flowing through the spinal column). In the heart one has to meditate on one's Chosen Deity as sitting on a red lotus with twelve petals, and in the head on the Guru as seated on a white lotus with a thousand petals. These meditations help Japa, and therefore, should be practised.

You cannot realize God through Tapasya, sacrifice, charity, or study of the scriptures. He alone realizes Him on whom descends His grace. But then you have, on the other hand, the words of the Upanishad: "This Atman cannot be realized by the weak." One who is weak and effortless cannot realize Him. The Gita lays stress on personal effort. "The self must be raised by the self, so let no one weaken this self. For this self is the friend of oneself and this self is the enemy of oneself." One has to liberate oneself from bondage, one should never be despondent. Here "self" means mind, intellect, etc.

Don't yield to despondency. It makes the mind restless. Always think that you are all blessed, that you are the children of the Lord. If evil thoughts come to your mind, don't pay any heed to them. There are impressions of past lives in the mind and now and then they come to the conscious plane. Have strength. There is no fear. You will get everything in time.

Low thoughts will come and go. Don't mind them. Through His grace, as a result of constant practice,

you will get strength. Devote your whole mind to Japa, meditation, worship, and study of the scriptures, whichever appeals to you for the time being. The Lord will set everything right. Shri Ramakrishna never liked one-sidedness. He was always for many-sidedness.

Mere mechanical Japa does not help much. You must have love for the Lord. But then, even mechanical Japa has some results, for after all, it is the Lord's name that is being repeated. But the main thing is love for the Lord with the idea that He is our father, mother, friend, master, everything. You must have some such relationship.

The one thing necessary is His grace. Without the Lord's grace no spiritual practice is possible. No one works independently. Everyone works as directed by Him. He is the mechanic and the rest are machines. But it is very hard to remember all this. If one has this idea, then one gets beyond all good and evil. If the Mother is gracious, then everything is possible—dispassion, spiritual practice, etc. The Lord has two powers—Vidya Shakti (knowledge) and Avidya Shakti (ignorance). If He removes from us the influence of the latter and helps with the former, then everything goes on well. So pray, "Mother, be gracious unto me." If Her grace is there, nothing is impossible.

Guru and Istha (chosen Ideal or Deity) are one. But then so long as you are in the relative world, bounded by name and form, you have to accept them as separate. When knowledge comes, you will find that the two are one.

Pray to the Lord for strength, knowledge, and dispassionateness. Pray to Him with all your heart for His grace, and for devotion and faith. It is not possible

for everyone to practise hard austerities, but then, through prayer everything is attained. If you find it difficult to meditate, be prayerful.

It is difficult to meditate on the formless. The Vedas prescribe Akasha as a symbol of the formless God. Other symbols like the ocean etc. may also be taken but Akasha is better. He resides in the heart of man as consciousness. But then one has to start with some form. There is no question of inferiority or superiority in this—it is a question of temperament. Whatever appeals to one is the best for him. Form melts into the formless, and again the formless takes a form. God is both with form and without form, and again beyond both.

It is not possible to comprehend Him with this mind. He can be comprehended only with the pure mind. The Master used to say, "The pure mind and the Self are one." That mind in which there are no mentations or desires cannot be called mind. Then there exists only an all-pervading consciousness, power, or Brahman —whatever you may call it.

SWAMI RAMAKRISHNANANDA

Even while (Swamiji) Swami Vivekananda was in the midst of his arduous labours in the West, he realised that more important work was awaiting him in India. When the great leader returned to the motherland and made his triumphal tour from Colombo to Almora, it was in the city of Madras that he first intimated to eager listeners his plan of compaign. Some of the citizens approached Swamiji with the request that he should kindly send one of his brother-disciples to stay in Madras and establish a monastery which would become the centre of the religious teachings and philanthropic activities outlined by Swamiji in his addresses delivered in India and abroad. By way of reply he said, "I shall send you one who is more orthodox than your most orthodox men of the South and who is at the same time unique and unsurpassed in his worship of and meditation on God." The very next steamer from Calcutta brought to Madras Swami Ramakrishnananda.

In a few words the leader had summarised the individual characteristics of the apostle in relation to the field of work for which he was chosen. South India has all along been the stronghold of orthodox Hinduism. In order to infuse new life into the ancient religion without breaking the continuity of the tradition, the apostle to the South had to be a person of great intellectual attainments, of unflinching devotion to the ideals, and of deep reverence for the forms of worship and religious practices sanctified by the authority of a succession of great teachers. Swami Ramakrishnananda

or Shashi Maharaj, as he was familiarly called, possessed all these and, in addition, he had an overflowing kindness, abounding sympathy for all, and a childlike nature which exhibited the inner purity of the soul.

Shashi Bhushan Chakravarti—that was the name by which Swami Ramakrishnananda was known in his premonastic days—was born in an orthodox Brahmin family of the Hooghly district, Bengal, on 13th July 1863. His father, Ishwarchandra Chakravarti, a strict observer of religious traditions and a devout worshipper of the Divine Mother, gave the early training that laid the foundation of the lofty character exhibited in the life of his great son.

Shashi went to school, and having successfully completed the school course, entered the Metropolitan College in Calcutta. He was a brilliant student at college and his favourite subjects were literature (both English and Sanskrit), mathematics, and philosophy. He and his cousin Sharat Chandra—afterwards Swami Saradananda—came under the influence of the Brahmo Samaj. Shashi became intimately known to the Brahmo leader, Keshab Chandra Sen, and was appointed private tutor to his sons.

On a certain day in October, 1883, Shashi and Sharat, along with a few other boy-companions, arrived at Dakshineswar to see the Master. Shri Ramakrishna received them with a smile and began to talk to them warmly about the need of renunciation in spiritual life. Shashi was then reading in the First Arts class and the others were preparing for matriculation. As Shashi was the oldest of the band, the conversation was addressed to him. Shri Ramakrishna asked Shashi whether he believed in God with form or without form. The boy

frankly answered that he was not certain about the existence of God and was not, therefore, able to speak one way or the other. The reply pleased the Master very much. Shashi and Sharat were fascinated by the personality of Shri Ramakrishna whom they henceforth accepted as their Master, the pole-star of their lives. Of Shashi and Sharat, Shri Ramakrishna used to say that both of them were the followers of Jesus the Christ in a former incarnation.

Although Shashi was a brilliant student, his interest in the college curriculum began to dwindle. Slowly and silently he was progressing in the life of the spirit. His keen intellect, robust physique, and steady character were beginning to centre round the one grand theme of God-realisation. One day at Dakshineswar it happened that he was busily engaged in studying some Persian books in order to read the Sufi poets in the original. The Master had called him thrice before he heard. When he came, Shri Ramakrishna asked him what he had been doing. Shashi said that he was absorbed in his books. He quietly remarked, "If you forget your duties for the sake of study, you will lose all your devotion." Shashi understood. He took the Persian books and threw them into the Ganga. From that time on book-learning had little importance in his scheme of life.

Shashi was then in the final B.A. class ; the examination was fast approaching. But at that very time Shri Ramakrishna was lying ill at Shyampukur in Calcutta. The young disciple had to decide between his studies and service to the person of the Master. Unhesitatingly he decided to give his body, mind and soul wholly and unreservedly to the service of the Master. He also followed the Master to the Cossipore

garden-house. Shashi was the very embodiment of service. Other disciples also gave their very best in the service of the Master. But Shashi's case was conspicuous. He knew no rest. He did not care for any other spiritual practice. Service to the Guru was the only concern of his life. Fortunately, he was endowed with a strong physique. But more than that, behind the body, there was a mind whose strength was incessantly sustained by his love and devotion to the Guru. Till the last moment of the earthly existence of the Master, Shashi was unflagging in his zeal to serve him as best as he could. Before Shri Ramakrishna lay down for the final departure, he sat up for some time against some five or six pillows which were supported by Shashi, who was at the same time fanning him. When the Master was in Mahasamadhi, the disciples could not at first realise what it was. Shashi rebuked those who thought that it was otherwise than Samadhi, and along with others began to chant holy texts. But despite their earnest hope the body did not indicate any sign of life, and the doctor finally declared it to be Mahasamadhi.

The greatest trial was at the burning ghat. Feelings of a contrasted character visited the soul of Shashi. Now the joy and bliss the Master had shed over them all at the time of the Mahasamadhi came over him and he sang the name of the Master in triumphant praise. Then a sense of utter loneliness stole over his joy and made him the victim of most violent grief. When the flames that had made ashes of the body of the Master had died out, amidst the silence that prevailed, Shashi gathered the sacred relics.

Then came the period of supreme depression. The boys who were children of the Master gathered together

at the newly founded monastery at Baranagore. Shashi played no small part in holding the young band together and in regulating the routine of life to be followed by them. While others were indifferent as to whether the body lived or went in their intense search for the Highest, Shashi took care that his brother-disciples had not to face starvation actually. He went so far as to serve as a schoolmaster—though for a very short period —to meet the expenses of the Math. He would say to his brothers, "You just continue your spiritual practices with undivided attention. You need not bother about anything else. I shall maintain the Math by begging." Swamiji recalling these blessed days many years later, said with reference to Swami Ramakrishnananda, "Oh, what a steadfastness to the ideal did we ever find in Shashi! He was a mother to us. It was he who managed about our food. We used to get up at three o'clock in the morning. Then all of us, some after bathing, would go to the worshiproom and be lost in Japa and meditation. There were times when the meditation lasted to four or five o'clock in the afternoon. Shashi would be waiting with our dinner; if necessary, he would by sheer force drag us out of our meditation. Who cared then if the world existed or not!"

The parents of the boys came and attempted to take them back to their homes, but they would not yield. Shashi's father came, begged and threatened, but to no purpose. The son said, "The world and home are to me as a place infested with tigers." The time came when the boys decided to renounce the world formally by taking the monastic vows. They changed their names. Shashi became Ramakrishnananda. Narendra Nath, the leader of the young band, wanted to have that name

for himself but thought that Shashi had a better claim to it because of his unparalleled love for the Master. Indeed Shashi's love for the Master sounds like a story—nay, has passed into stories. Death could not rob him of the living presence of the Master. He served the Master in the relics with the same devotion and earnestness as when he had been physically alive. Others went on pilgrimages, adopting the wandering life of the monk. Swami Rāmakrishnananda stuck like a sentinel on to the holy spot where the Master's relics were temporarily enshrined. Worshipping the Master and keeping the monastery as the centre to which the wanderers would occasionally return were the duties which Ramakrishnananda assigned to himself. He did not think of going to a single place of pilgrimage. What place under the sun could be more sacred to him than where the relics of the Master lay? He would personally attend to all the items of worship; he would bring water from the Ganga, gather flowers, and prepare the food to be offered. He would not take any food that was not offered to the Master. The very soul of devotion entered into Swami Ramakrishnananda.

If Shashi's devotion to the Guru was beyond comparison with any earthly example, his love for Swamiji whom Shri Ramakrishna had ordained as the leader of the whole group, was wonderful. Any word from the leader was more than a command to him. There was no trouble which he would not face, no sacrifice which he would not make in deference to the slightest wish of Swami Vivekananda. This spirit was so strongly manifest in him, that Swami Vivekananda would at times make fun with him taking advantage of his love. Shashi, as we have seen, was very orthodox in

his attitude. One day the leader asked him, "Shashi, I want to put your love for me to the test. Can you buy me a piece of English bread from a Mohammedan shop?" Shashi at once agreed and actually did the thing. After Swamiji's return from the West when he proposed to Shashi to go to Madras to do preaching work, Shashi at once responded to the call. It meant that he would have to give up many habits of long years, it meant that he would have to leave the place where he was so steadfastly worshipping the relics of the Master. But these were no considerations against the wish of the leader.

After the Master had discouraged his book-learning, Shashi lost all interest in study. His whole heart was centred in devotion and worship. Now he was asked to preach religion and philosophy. The great heart had to become the mighty intellect. It may be that for this reason the leader directed Swami Ramakrishnananda to go to Madras. A combination of deep devotion and keen intellect is something very rare. But this very rare type was needed for the work in South India, and it was the good fortune of that province to get such an apostle. The Ramakrishna Mission work in the South now stands as a noble edifice giving shelter to thousands of persons who seek the consolation which religion alone can give. But the strong foundation for this imposing edifice was firmly laid by the great monk, the first apostle of the Ramakrishna Order to Madras.

Swami Ramakrishnananda arrived at Madras in 1897. At first he was housed in a small building near the "Ice House," from where he had to shift to some rooms in the Ice House where Swamiji had lived after his return from the West. A little later when the house was

auctioned away by the owner, the Swami had to stay in an outhouse of the same building at great personal inconvenience. When the Ice House was put to auction, the devotees very much wished that if possible some of their friends should purchase it, so that Swami Ramakrishnananda might not be inconvenienced and his work might go on smoothly. As the auction was proceeding, the Swami sat unconcerned in a far end of the compound on a rickety bench. A devotee was anxiously watching the bidding, and now and then reporting to the Swami how it was progressing. The Swami looked up and said, "Why do you worry about it ? What do we care who buys or sells? My wants are few. I need only a small room for Shri Guru Maharaj. I can stay anywhere and spend my time in talking of him." Indeed such was the attitude of the Swami throughout his whole life, even latterly when he received much ovation and many honours.

It was in 1907 that a permanent house[1] for the Math was constructed on a small site in a suburb of the city. The house was a simple one-storied building consisting of four rooms, a spacious hall, kitchen, and outhouses. The Swami was delighted when at last there was a permanent place where the Master's worship could be carried on uninterruptedly. He said, "This is a fine house for Shri Ramakrishna to live in. Realising that he occupies it, we must keep it very clean and very pure. We should take care not to disfigure the walls by driving nails or otherwise."

The worship of the Master as done by Swami Ramakrishnananda was very striking. A spiritual aspirant

[1] This has since been replaced by a larger building.

longs to experience the tangible presence of God. But with Swami Ramakrishnananda it was an entirely different matter. He so vividly realised the presence of God that there was no room for any craving for that in his mind. It was only left to him to serve Him, and he did it with unwavering ardour. He would serve his Master exactly in the way he did while he was in the physical body. Some article of food is preferred hot; Swami Ramakrishnananda would keep the stove burning and offer that piece by piece to the Master. He would offer to the Master a piece of twig hammered soft to be used as a toothbrush, as is the practice in some Indian homes. After the midday offerings, he would fan the Master for some time so that the latter could easily have his nap. On hot days he would suddenly wake up at night, open the shrine and fan the Master so that the latter might not be disturbed in sleep because of the sweltering heat. Sometimes he would talk sulkily with the Master, blaming him for something. To a critical mind these things might seem queer, but he only knew what great Presence he felt. These actions were so natural and spontaneous with him that a witness would sometimes even fall into respecting him for them. Once a certain gentleman, who was then holding the highest position in Government service, called at the monastery to pay his respects to Swami Ramakrishnananda. The Swami, after finishing the morning worship, was at that time fanning the portrait of the Master, which he would do for a couple of hours and more, uttering the names of the Lord—Shiva Guru, Sat Guru, Sanâtana Guru, Parama Guru, and so on. During such times, the face of the Swami would be flushed red with emotion and his tall and robust figure would look more

imposing. The whole sight struck the visitor with such awe and reverence that he could do nothing but prostrate before the Swami and return home.

A bold student to whom the Swami gave the liberty of arguing, once freely criticised him for worshipping the portrait of a dead man as that indicated an aberration of mind. The Swami said that the images in temples were not simply dull, dead, inert matter, but were living Gods who could be spoken to. There was such a ring of sincerity and genuineness of feeling behind these words that in spite of himself, the conviction stole on the critic, as he himself afterwards narrated, that what he heard could not but be true.

But if Swami Ramakrishnananda's devotion was great, his intellectual acumen was no less so. His scholarship in Sanskrit was immense. Not knowing the local dialect, he had sometimes to hold conversations with orthodox pundits in Sanskrit. He wrote the life of the great Acharya Ramanuja in Bengali, which has become an authoritative book on that saint. Not only of Hindu scriptures, but also his knowledge of Christianity and of Islam was superb. He knew the Bible from cover to cover and could expound it with a penetrating insight which would strike even orthodox Christian theologians with awe. Once on a Good Friday he gave a talk on the Crucifixion with so much depth of feeling and vividness of description that a Western listener, with experience of sermons in churches, became amazed as to how the words of the Swami could be so living. Though to all intents and purposes he was living like an orthodox Hindu, his love for the Prophets of other faiths was genuine and sometimes embarrassing to his orthodox followers. Those who have seen him going to St. Thomas's Church

in Madras relate that he would go straight up to the altar and kneel before it like a Christian and pray.

One evening some Mohammedan students, caught in the rain, took shelter in the monastery. The Swami warmly welcomed them and talked to them not of his own faith but of Islam. His exposition was so illuminating that those Mohammedan students repeated their visit to the monastery many times afterwards.

When holding scripture classes or giving religious discourses, he would not simply explain the texts or repeat the scriptural authorities. He would at times give flashes of illumination from the depth of his realisations. Because of this, his words were always penetrating. They would silence even those who came with a combative spirit. With a few words he could explain philosophical problems on which volumes had been written. He had a great knack of probing into the heart of things and of expressing the truth in pithy sayings. Once after discussions with the professor of a local college in regard to politics and religion, the Swami said, "Politics is the freedom *of* the senses, while religion is freedom *from* the senses." With reference to dualistic and monistic systems of philosophy he once remarked, "In the dualistic method enjoyment is the ideal ; in the monistic method freedom is the ideal. By the first the lover gets his beloved at last, and by the second the slave becomes the master. Both are sublime. One has no need to go from one ideal to the other." "Science is the struggle of man in the outer world. Religion is the struggle of man in the inner world", he once said in the course of conversation: "Both struggles are great, no doubt. but one ends in success and the other ends in failure. That is the difference. Religion begins where science ends."

He had, however, no prejudice against science. At times he would be doing mathematical problems as a pastime. Once he procured from a local college all the latest authoritative books on astronomy and began to study them assiduously. It was not difficult for him to understand them.

Throughout his stay in Madras, the Swami had to work very hard and pass through strenuous days. In the early period, he had to cook his own food, do service in the shrine, and hold classes in various parts of the city. Sometimes the financial trouble was appalling. But very few people outside his intimate group knew of his difficulties. He would often be very reluctant even to accept the help proffered, for he did not like that anybody should undergo any sacrifice for him. One day there was not a drop of ghee in the Math to fry *chapati*. He was in a fix and began pacing up and down the verandah, not knowing where help would come from. As a strange coincidence, a student of his class approached him exactly at that time and whispered into his ear about his intention of contributing his mite to the Math as he had a promotion in the office. But the Swami did not, at first agree to accept anything from him, lest it should cause him some hardship. It was only after great insistence and supplication that the Swami agreed to have some quantity of ghee. If questioned as to how the Swami was meeting his bodily wants, he would say with placid composure, "God sends me whenever I want anything." "If we cannot get on altogether without help, then why not ask the Lord Himself? Why go to others?" he would say. And on many occasions help would come to the Swami in quite unexpected ways. A devotee says, "Once the birthday of Shri Ramakrishna

was near and no money had been received for the feeding of the poor, which was an important item of the celebration. It was midnight and I was sleeping in the Math, when I suddenly woke up, roused by strange sounds in the hall. Looking about, I could see the Swami pacing up and down like a lion in a cage, mumbling noisily with every breath. I was afraid to see him in that condition, but I understood later that it was his praying for help to feed the poor. The next morning money did come. A large donation was received from the Yuvaraja of Mysore who had begun to admire the Swami, having read his book *The Universe and Man,* just then published."

Without caring for his bodily wants, quite indifferent to his personal needs, he worked tremendously to spread the message of the Master and in the cause of Vedanta. On certain days of the week he had to lecture more than twice or thrice. His classes were scattered over different parts of the city, and to many of them he had for a long time to go on foot. Sometimes he would return to the Math quite exhausted, and as little energy was left for cooking, he would finish his night meal with only a piece of bread purchased from a bakery. People would wonder how he could stand such a severe strain. But the secret of this lay perhaps in his complete self-surrender to the Lord. Once he said, "Suppose a pen were conscious; it could say, 'I have written hundreds of letters', but actually it has done nothing, for the one who holds it has written the letters. So because we are conscious, we think we are doing all these things, whereas in reality we are as much an instrument in the hands of a Higher Power as the pen is in our hands, and He makes all things possible."

While holding classes or delivering lectures he never posed himself as a superior personage having a right to teach others. He considered himself always as a humble servant of the Lord. Sometimes on returning to the Math after delivering lectures, he would undergo some self-imposed punishment and earnestly pray to the Master that the lecture work might not give rise to any sense of egotism in him. Sometimes he had strange experiences in the classes, and he had a novel way of meeting them. After the first enthusiasm had died out, all his classes were not so well-attended. That depended also on what part of the city the class was held in. If, for any reason, not a single student happened to come to any of his classes, he would still give his discourse as usual in the empty room or spend in meditation the period fixed for the class. If asked the reason for these unusual actions, the Swami would reply, "I have not come here to teach others. This work is like a vow to me, and I am fulfilling it irrespective of whether anyone comes or does not come to my class."

In regard to what he taught, he was uncompromising and fearless. Someone, finding him to hold high the ideals of renunciation and fearing lest some of the young listeners might be attracted to the ideal, suggested that certain devotees who were subscribing towards the maintenance of the Math might not like his teaching such things to the young people. On hearing these remarks, Swami Ramakrishnananda flared up and thundered forth, "What, am I to preach anything other than what I have learnt from my Master? If the Math cannot be financially maintained, I shall very gladly find accommodation in the verandah of one of my students' houses."

His work was not confined only to the city of Madras, but it spread throughout the Madras Presidency. One of the most important field of his activities was the Mysore State. When the name and influence of Swami Ramakrishnananda as a bearer of the message of the Master and Swamiji began to spread, the Vedanta Society of Ulsoor in Bangalore sent him an invitation in 1903 to deliver a course of lectures there. He accepted the invitation, and a splendid reception was accorded on his arrival. He stayed in Bangalore for three weeks. During this period he delivered about a dozen public lectures and held conversations morning and evening. His lectures were attended by a large number of eager and enthusiastic people, and his classes were also equally popular.

In the same year he carried the message of his Master to Mysore as well, where he delivered a series of five lectures. A noteworthy address was given in Sanskrit to the pundits of the place assembled in the local Sanskrit College. In this he rose to the height of his eloquence and clearly showed how the message of his Master harmonised the interpretations of the Vedanta by different Acharyas. It was very bold of him to do so, for the Sanskrit scholars of the South, strong champions of orthodoxy as they were, could hardly believe in anything outside the particular system of philosophy they followed.

The interest created by him in Bangalore was kept up by the Ulsoor Vedanta Society. In the following year he was again invited to Bangalore, this time to open a permanent centre. He delivered a series of lectures, opened some classes and left a junior Swami there to continue the work. In August 1906, he revisited

Bangalore and Mysore with his brother-disciple Swami Abhedananda, who had recently come from America. The two Swamis together delivered several lectures and consolidated the Vedanta work in Mysore State. During this visit the foundation-stone of the Bangalore Ashrama was laid. After the building was constructed, Swami Brahmananda came on invitation to open it. Afterwards, Swami Ramakrishnananda would visit Bangalore whenever he could snatch away time from his busy life, and he directed the Ashrama and the Mission work in Bangalore and Mysore from Madras.

Swami Ramakrishnananda also visited Trivandrum and spent about a month there creating enthusiasm in the minds of the people. Besides, he made extensive tours to several parts of South India, and as a result of this, centres were started in several important places. His fame as a teacher of Vedanta spread far and wide. Even from such distant places as Burma and Bombay he received invitations. He visited those places and achieved great success.

Some of the discourses he delivered in various places have been published in book form. They now furnish spiritual sustenance to innumerable people who had not the opportunity to come into direct contact with him. Of these books *The Universe and Man* and *The Soul of Man* give lucid expositions of some of the fundamental principles of Vedanta. *Sri Krishna, the Pastoral and King-maker* is, as the title shows, the life of that great Divinity on earth and is a study of the hero as God-man.

Swami Ramakrishnananda was not a very eloquent speaker. There was no oratorical flourish in his speech. But his sincerity and thorough grasp of spiritual real-

ities made his speeches very impressive. He was always at his best in the conversational method of teaching, which appealed directly to the heart owing to the sincerity with which it was uttered. Great truths, complicated questions, controversial problems, and all the heights and depths of ethics were discussed, but in the most simple manner possible, so that even a child might understand them.

In day-to-day dealings Swami Ramakrishnananda was full of overflowing love. We have seen how at the Baranagore monastery he was "like a mother" to all, taking extreme care of them. When any brother-disciple of his came to the South on pilgrimage, he would be beside himself with joy, and did not know how sufficiently to take care of him. All feelings of Swami Ramakrishnananda welled forth, as it were, when Swami Brahmananda visited the South, and there was nothing he would not do for him. His attitude towards Swami Brahmananda was the logical outcome of his devotion to the Master. Because Shri Ramakrishna loved Swami Brahmananda so much, Swami Ramakrishnananda also treated him more with reverence than with brotherly love. It was a sight to see Swami Ramakrishnananda, with his bulky body, prostrate himself before his great brother-disciple in all humility. A similar attitude in Swami Ramakrishnananda, though in a more intense degree, was in evidence, when the Holy Mother, with a party of women devotees, came to the South on pilgrimage. It is said that on this occasion he worked so hard to remove even the slightest inconvenience that might befall the party, that his health permanently broke down.

It was to his great loving heart that the Ramakrishna

Mission Students' Home in Madras owed its origin. At Coimbatore he once found that all the members of a family, except a few helpless children, had been swept away by plague. The pitiable condition of these poor children was too much for the loving heart of the Swami, so he took charge of them. This was the genesis of the educational activities of the Mission in the South, which have since expanded very greatly.

A teacher, he cared more for building up lives than for reaching a wide circle of indifferent auditors. He was a strict disciplinarian and insisted that all who came under his influence be perfect and exemplary in every detail of their conduct. Once a student was found sitting in his class with his chin resting on the palm of his hand. He at once said, "Do not sit like that, it is a pensive attitude. You should always cultivate a cheerful attitude." Sometimes thoughtless visitors to the Math would take out the daily paper and begin to read. The Swami would at once administer a mild rebuke saying, "Put away your paper. You can read that anywhere. When you come here, you should think of God." Once a proud and vainglorious pundit came to the Math and began to talk of his plans for reforming temples, society, etc. Swami Ramakrishnananda listened to him quietly for some time and then opened his lips to remark, "I wonder what God did before you were born." The man at once became silent, and the conversation turned to healthier things. The man afterwards left the Math with a better attitude of mind. Once Swami Ramakrishnananda and an American devotee were putting up in the royal guest quarters at Bangalore as the guests of the Maharaja of Mysore. One day a member of the Maharaja's official staff came to see them. The

visitor began to detail some court gossip to the American devotee thinking that that would be a very entertaining topic of conversation. All the while that the conversation was going on, the Swami shifted his position in his chair again and again showing evident signs of great discomfort. When asked if he was feeling unwell, the Swami unsophistically said, "I am all right, but I do not like your conversation." The visitor, however, took the rebuke without any offence and changed the subject of conversation.

His own life was extremely disciplined. He was very regular and punctual in his habits. He would follow his self-imposed daily duties under any circumstances. As a rule, he began the day by reading the *Gita* and the *Vishnu-Sahasranâma*. Once the Swami passed the night outside the Math, to keep company with Swami Premananda, when the latter was on pilgrimage in the South. That night Swami Ramakrishnananda had not with him the *Gita* and the *Vishnu-Sahasranâma*. When he discovered this, he sent some one out to procure copies of those two books, so that he might not miss reading them next morning.

Though in managing the monastery he was a stern disciplinarian, at heart he was extremely soft and kind. Once when the time came for the departure of a junior Swami of the Order who had come to Madras, Swami Ramakrishnananda fed him well sitting by him and actually burst into tears when the latter was about to leave. Another time Swami Ramakrishnananda had gone to Bengal, and when he visited Calcutta, he learnt that a young Brahmacharin of the Order who had for some time lived with him at Madras was lying ill at his parental home in the city. The Swami himself went to

see the patient at his home. At this the Brahmacharin was dumbfounded, that Swami Ramakrishnananda who was held in such high esteem throughout the country should come to his bed-side. He could hardly believe his eyes.

It was his love for humanity that impelled him to work so hard in Madras. But after some time the body gave indication that it could no longer stand the stress of so much hard work. Yet the spirit was there. The Swami did not listen to the whisper of the flesh. In spite of his indifferent health, he carried on his hard labour till the body completely broke down, and the doctors diagnosed the disease as consumption. Word was sent to Calcutta, and his fellow-monks there begged him to pass his last days with them. This he felt was best. He had thought of it, but not until the command came from the President of the Mission did he leave Madras. In Calcutta he was housed at the monastery in Baghbazar, and the most noted physicians visited him of their own accord. But his condition grew worse.

Most remarkable, however, was the strength of his spirit which burst forth in eloquent discourses concerning high spiritual matters, even whilst the body suffered most. One who loved him dearly, noticing him speak thus in this distressed state of body, asked him to desist. "Why?" came the reply, "When I speak of the Lord, all pain leaves me, I forget the body." Even in delirium his mind and his voice were given to God. "Durgâ, Durgâ", "Shiva, Shiva", and the name of his Master were ever on his lips. His great esteem and his love for Christ, which was manifest throughout his lifetime, revived constantly in those days. Speaking of Jesus he would become eloquent. He would speak of how Shri

Ramakrishna had regarded Christ and of how, when the Master had had the vision of Christ during Samadhi, the very body of the great founder of Christianity had entered into him.

Swami Ramakrishnananda entered into Final Realisation on 21st August 1911.

TEACHINGS

We understand by God a being that is infinite in every way, infinitely powerful, infinitely lovely, infinitely conscious; and because He is infinite, He can never be finite.

Mind is bound on all sides by ignorance, and if you compare your knowledge with your ignorance, your knowledge seems infinitesimal. Now it is impossible for the limited to conceive the unlimited.

Our Master Shri Ramakrishna used to say that the poison of the cobra is most deadly, yet that poison does not hurt it. Similarly Maya is inside God, but can never interfere with the nature of God any more than the poison can injure the cobra. God plays the part of a creator, that He may have the fun of creating, preserving, and destroying. That is the method He always follows when He wants to create, and this is God's relationship with Maya. God is infinitely powerful, so He has the power to put down the irresistible power of Maya.

But what is our relationship with Maya? We are her slaves. You cannot be destroyed by Maya, but she can make you miserable through eternity. Then how are we going to get rid of her? Only by the help of God can we hope to get rid of her.

If you know that you are eternal and indestructible, then you are not body, you are spirit, and that Self is beyond the reach of Maya, that Self is one with God. If you can identify yourself with this real Self of yours and throw away your self, then you can go beyond the

dominion of Maya, and this path is known as Jnana-marga.

Those who can resist the demands of the body, can afford to wage an incessant war against Maya and come out victorious. But they are very few. For the others, they can only take refuge at God's feet.

What kind of devotion takes us to God? The child's devotion to the mother. Why does the baby go to the mother? Because it has reasoned out that the mother is the best friend it has. And why do you go to God? Because you have previously reasoned out that God will help you, and no one else can. So, as the baby goes to its mother, you will go to God.

The souls, not being free and not knowing to guide themselves, on account of the limited nature of their minds, should be guided by God, their omnipotent and omniscient Master, if they want to get rid of death and countless woes; and their highest wisdom should consist in allowing themselves to be guided by God and not by themselves.

No man who has not true love towards God can be religious. Religion begins when attraction towards God is greater than attraction towards the world.

The attraction towards the world means egotism, attraction towards God means self-surrender.

Actually very few of us believe in God all the time. How do we know this? Because we allow anxieties and fears to arise in our minds. If we really have faith in God and in His infinite power of goodness, we can never feel fearful about anything.

What makes the mind impure? Desire. Free the mind of all desires, and at once it becomes pure. A man, however, who has no idea of God, can never get

rid of desire. The lover of God sees that instead of bringing enjoyment, these desires are the source of all miseries. He understands that in God alone he can find the satisfaction of all desires, for He is infinite bliss, and all other pleasures are finite and perishable.

We seek matter first and spirit afterwards. We should reverse the process. Our hearts also must be free from any ulterior motive. If we love God for what we can get from Him in the world, we really love the world, not God, and we can never be true devotees. The true devotee loves God just for the joy of loving Him, because God is the Beloved.

Ananda or bliss is the best definition of God. The real ideal of every human being is Sachchidananda—eternal Life, infinite Knowledge, and everlasting Bliss, for all men wish to live for ever, to be all-knowing, and to have eternal bliss. But God alone is all-life, all-knowledge and all-happiness; therefore God is really the ideal of every living being.

Almost all men in the world have usurped the throne where God should sit. On that throne where God should be, a most worthless slave has been given place. This is the ego. When you know this, then drive out the ego. When you do this and become the slave or servant of God instead, you will realize your eternal nature. Being one with God, all fear of death will go, peace will come to you, and you will taste true Ananda (bliss).

So long as we have no ideal to follow, we will have to heed the calls of our lower nature. A characterless man is a slave to all worldly enjoyments.

All religions teach the necessity of hero-worship. Who is a hero? The man who has realised his oneness with

God, who has self-knowledge, for religion is not a matter of talk or learning or faith, but a matter of realisation. A man of realisation alone is the true teacher, the Guru. So you must hear, study, understand, and then try to realise with the aid of a real Guru.

The path which leads you to realise life eternal is not by the exercise of your outgoing energies but by your ingoing energies. You must collect your energies and direct them inwards.

You have been worshipping this god of your body for so many lives, it is not easy to begin to worship the true God all at once. If you would raise your Self, you must crucify the body and conquer the senses.

Always mixing with the world and identifying ourselves with the body, we are prone to forget religion which awakens us to the real state of affairs which we are in, and opens to us the gate of eternal bliss, and keeps us away from being drawn down to the abject life of beasts—doing nothing but eating and drinking and making merry. Such being the case, there must be something that will occasionally remind us as to who we are, and what we should do, so that we may not be altogether forgetful of our duties here. It is religion that fulfils this purpose.

SWAMI ABHEDANANDA

Swami Abhedananda was one of those rare souls who gathered round the magnetic personality of Shri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar and afterwards became instrumental in the fulfilment of his divine mission. The name by which the Swami was known before his taking orders was Kaliprasad Chandra. He was born on 2nd October 1866, in an enlightened family at Aheeritola in Calcutta. His mother Nayantara Devi was intensely devoted to the Goddess Kali, to whom she offered her whole-souled prayer for the birth of a gifted son. It was in response, as it were, to her ardent prayer that the child was born, and she named him "Kaliprasad" to betoken the grace of the Divine Mother. Kaliprasad's father, Rasiklal Chandra, was a senior teacher of English in the Oriental Seminary of Calcutta. He was no less pious that his devoted wife. No wonder that a child, who in after years shone as a bright luminary in the spiritual firmament of India, should be born of such a worthy couple. His school life began at the age of five, and he excelled all his schoolmates in study, games, paintings, and similar other pursuits. He often listened with rapt attention to the inspiring stories of the great Indian epics from the lips of his dear patients who, knowing the mental make-up of the boy, always tried to kindle in him an aspiration to emulate the lives of the great spiritual heroes of the land.

From his very boyhood he was inclined to Sanskrit studies. At the age of eighteen he creditably passed

the Entrance Examination from the Calcutta Oriental Seminary, in which, as already mentioned, his father was a teacher of English. Gifted with a genius for philosophic contemplation the boy soon began to interest himself in solving the various intricate problems of life. His desire to become a philosopher was greatly stimulated when he read for the first time in Wilson's *History of India* that Shankaracharya was the propounder of the Advaita system of philosophy. This opened a new chapter in his life. His perusal of the Gita served only to intensify all the more his yearning to follow in the footsteps of the great Âchâryas (propounders of systems of thought) and to study their philosophies. But along with this ever-increasing thirst for acquiring spiritual wisdom, he felt as well a strong urge to widen the bounds of his intellectual knowledge by studying the masterpieces of great savants of the East and the West. Even at this tender age he finished reading not only such abstruse books as John Stuart Mill's *Logic, Three Essays on Religion,* Herschel's *Astronomy,* Ganot's *Physics,* Lewis's *History of Philosophy,* and Hamilton's *Philosophy,* but also the great works of Kalidasa, Bhavabhuti, Banabhatta, and other eminent poets of our land—a fact which gives ample evidence of his prodigious intellect and extraordinary genius.

His intellectual allegiance was not confined to any particular school of thought. He developed even at this early age a remarkable sympathy for all faiths. That is why we find him so intently listening to the illuminating lectures delivered by the distinguished leaders and exponents of Christianity, Brahmoism, and Hinduism. In 1883 he attended a series of public

lectures delivered by the noted Hindu philosopher, Shashadhar Tarkachudamani, on the six systems of Hindu philosophy. He was deeply impressed when he heard his pregnant discourse on the Yoga system of Patanjali and learnt about the infinite possibilities of the human soul. Thenceforth he made a special study of some of the most authoritative books on the subject and felt a strong desire to practise Yoga. But he was told by his friends not to follow any of the methods described in the *Yoga-Sutras* without the proper guidance of a competent preceptor. The boy now began to search for a suitable teacher who would make him a real Yogi and teach him how to attain to the Nirvikalpa Samadhi, the crowning glory of man's spiritual experiences. One of his class-mates, with whom he discussed the matter, told him of Shri Ramakrishna and directed him to go to the great saint.

Kaliprasad grew restless to see the Master. But for some reason or other, he could not get a suitable opportunity to go to Dakshineswar for a long time. At last, one day in the middle of 1884, he started at noon for the temple-garden in the grilling heat of the sun. But great was his disappointment when he came to learn after reaching the place that Shri Ramakrishna had gone to Calcutta and would not return till after nightfall. Sorely perplexed, he sat down with a heavy heart under a tree. After a while, a young man, Shashi by name (afterwards Swami Ramakrishnananda), appeared there and asked him in loving accents the reason for his coming to Dakshineswar. Kali opened his heart to him. Shashi, coming to know that Kali had not eaten anything at noon, at once made arrangement for his dinner and midday siesta. Kali passed the whole afternoon in

a breathless thrill of expectancy. The day rolled on into night, but still the Master did not come! The joy of the boy, however, knew no bounds when at about nine o'clock Shri Ramakrishna came back to Dakshineswar. The boy silently entered the Master's room and made obeisance to him. Without any hesitation, he expressed his desire to learn Yoga from him so that he might attain to the highest state of Samadhi. At the very first sight, the Master fathomed the depth of the boy's soul, and was delighted to notice the vast spiritual possibilities latent in him. He instinctively felt that Kali belonged to the inner circle of his young devotees. Shri Ramakrishna was overjoyed to hear the words of the boy and said, "You were a great Yogi in your previous birth. This is your last birth. I shall initiate you into the mysteries of Yoga practices." So saying he endearingly drew him to his side, wrote a Mantra on his tongue and placed his right hand on the chest of the boy. The mystic touch of the Master brought about a wonderful revolution in his mind, and he immediately became buried in deep meditation. After that Kali began to practise religious discipline in right earnest under the loving guidance of the Master, and through his grace was blessed with many spiritual experiences.

He now began to avail himself of every opportunity to run away from the stifling atmosphere of his home and to sit at the feet of the Master in the calm and elevating environs of the temple-garden of Dakshineswar. His thirsty soul drank deep at the perennial fount of heavenly wisdom which issued from the lips of the Master for the spiritual comfort of eager aspirants. As time rolled on, Kali found in him

the embodiment of the Absolute Truth inculcated by the highest philosophy as well as of the universal religion which underlies all sectarian religions of the world. From the Master he eventually realised that the three orders of metaphysical thought—dualism, qualified monism, and monism—are but stages on the way to the Supreme Truth. They are not contradictory but complementary to one another. Thus the validity of all stages that are harmoniously knitted in a graded series of spiritual experiences culminating in the realisation of the Formless Absolute—the One without a second—was made clear to him by the Supermystic of Dakshineswar.

Kali soon became intimately acquainted with Narendra Nath, the chief disciple of Shri Ramakrishna, and he often held learned discussions with him on various abstruse points of philosophy, both Eastern and Western. During the illness of the Master at Shyampukur and Cossipore in 1885-86, Kali, along with others, devoted himself heart and soul to the service of the Master and, after his passing, he renounced the world and became a Sannyasin with the monastic name of Swami Abhedananda. At the Baranagore monastery where one by one the young disciples of the Master gathered together and banded themselves into a holy fraternity of monks under the leadership of Narendra Nath, Kali used very often to shut himself up in his own room for intense spiritual practices as also for a systematic study of Vedanta and Western philosophy. This rigorous course of spiritual discipline and his deep devotion to the study of Vedanta excited the admiration of all and earned for him the significant epithets of "Kali Tapasvi" (the

ascetic Kali) and "Kali Vedanti". During this time he composed beautiful Sanskrit hymns on Shri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother. The latter was deeply impressed when she heard the excellent hymn composed about her own self, and she blessed him heartily, saying, "May the Goddess of Learning ever dwell in your throat." Indeed this blessing of the Holy Mother came to be fulfilled both in letter and in spirit.

But very soon the "call of the forest"—a tendency to embrace a wandering life according to the orthodox traditions of monastic life—was most irresistibly felt by Swami Abhedananda. And he travelled barefooted from place to place, depending entirely on whatever chance would bring to him. He endured all sorts of privation and hardship and practised austerities of all kinds. He walked up to the sources of the Ganga and the Jumna, spent most of the time in contemplation of the Absolute, visited sacred places like Kedarnath and Badrinarayan, Hardwar and Puri, Dwaraka and Rameswaram, and met in the course of his extensive travels some of the greatest saints and scholars of the time in various centres of religious culture. While at Rishikesh he made a special study of Vedanta under a celebrated monk named Swami Dhanaraj Giri who was noted for his profundity of scholarship and was well versed in the six systems of Hindu philosophy. Needless to say, this rich and varied experience of his itinerant life made him eminently fit to deliver to humanity at large in after years the lofty and universal message of his Master.

Up to this time the ideal of these young monks had been to strive for their personal liberation and realisation of the Supreme Atman by severe penance and meditation, remaining as much as possible aloof from

the world in consonance with the prevailing Hindu idea, sanctified by tradition and sanctioned by the sages and seers from hoary antiquity. But Swami Vivekananda, who was then in America, brought home to the minds of his Gurubhais, through his inspiring epistles, the fact that the mission of his life was to create a new order of monks in India who would dedicate their lives to serve others and scatter broadcast over the entire world the life-giving ideas of the Master. The idea of personal liberation, he pointed out, was unworthy of those who believed themselves to be the favoured disciples of a Prophet. Because of his profound faith in the leader, Swami Abhedananda together with other brother-disciples accepted his views knowing that the voice of Swami Vivekananda was the voice of the Master. Thus a new orientation of outlook on the monastic life came upon him.

In response to an invitation from Swamiji who was then preaching Vedanta in London, he went there in the latter part of 1896. By way of introducing him to the London public Swamiji announced even before Swami Abhedananda's public appearance that a learned brother-disciple of his, who had just arrived from India, would deliver a lecture on Advaita Vedanta at the next meeting to be held in the Christo-Theosophical Society of London. The new Swami was taken by surprise as he had not been previously consulted in the matter! His name was flashed in handbills and newspapers even without his knowledge! He was sorely perplexed and became extremely nervous, inasmuch as he had not before this stood on any public platform to deliver a speech either in English or in any Indian language. It was indeed a fiery ordeal for him. He strongly remon-

strated with Swamiji for this step which he thought unwise, but all his arguments were of no avail. Swamiji heartened him with the inspiring words, "Depend on him who has ever given me strength and courage in all the trials of my life." These words comforted him, and relying entirely on the infinite grace of the Master, he appeared at the meeting on the appointed day.

The hall was packed to suffocation, and all eyes were fixed upon the radiant countenance of the heroic soul who stood to discharge his responsibility at that crucial hour. The maiden speech which Swami Abhedananda delivered before the Society was a splendid success. At this, Swamiji's joy knew no bounds. Referring to this happy occasion, Mr. Eric Hammond, an English disciple of Swami Vivekananda, writes: "The Master (Swami Vivekananda) was more than content to have effaced himself in order that his brother's opportunity should be altogether unhindered. The whole impression had in it a glowing beauty quite indescribable. It was as though the Master thought, 'Even if I perish on this plane, my message will be sounded through these dear lips and the world will hear it.'" Hearing this lecture, Captain Sevier, another English disciple of Swamiji made the pertinent observation, "Swami Abhedananda is a born preacher. Wherever he will go, he will have success."

Swami Vivekananda was fully confident that even in his absence Swami Abhedananda would be the fittest person to carry on, with success, the work which had been started in London. So he entrusted him with the charge of his classes on Vedanta and Raja-Yoga and left for India in December 1896. Swami Abhedananda continued his classes and delivered public lectures in

churches and before religious and philosophical Societies in London and its suburbs for one year. During his stay in London he formed acquaintance with many distinguished savants including Prof. Max Müller and Prof. Paul Deussen. His eloquence, his lucid exposition of Vedanta philosophy and, above all, his depth of spiritual realisation made a profound impression on all who came in touch with him and listened to his illuminating lectures. It reflects much credit on his many-sided genius that even within this short period he succeeded in creating in the minds of the Western people a deep-seated regard for the richness and integrity of Indian thought and culture.

In 1897 a new chapter was opened in his eventful life. At the request of American friends and with the approval of Swamiji, Swami Abhedananda crossed the Atlantic and landed in New York on 9th August to take charge of the Vedanta Society which had already been started there. He was almost penniless at this time and had to work hard to push on the work. By dint of perseverance, self-confidence and unflinching devotion to the Master he was soon able to create a field for himself and tide over the swarm of difficulties that surrounded him at the initial stage of his work. But his success soon excited the jealousy of the Christian missionaries, who began to fabricate scandalous lies to bring the Swami into disrepute. Nothing daunted, Swami Abhedananda carried on his work with his usual vigour and sang-froid. He was soon acclaimed as a great exponent of Hindu thought and culture and was invited to speak before various learned Societies. His profundity of scholarship, incisive intellectual powers, oratorical talents, and his charming personality made him so popular that in New

York itself, in the Mott Memorial Hall he had to deliver ninety lectures to satisfy public demand. Even the greatest savants of America became greatly impressed by his intellectual brilliance. On one occasion in 1898 Prof. William James held a discussion with him in his house on the problem of the Unity of the Ultimate Reality. It lasted for nearly four hours, and Prof. Royce, Prof. Lanman, Prof. Shaler, and Dr. Janes, the Chairman of the Cambridge Philosophical Conferences, took part. Prof. James was finally forced to admit that from the Swami's standpoint it was impossible to deny ultimate unity, but declared that he still could not believe it.

In most of his lectures he called upon his audience to cultivate purity of thought and a spirit of love for all, irrespective of caste, creed, or nationality. "Whether we believe in God or not," said the Swami, "whether we have faith in prophets or not, if we have self-control, concentration, truthfulness, and disinterested love for all, then we are on the way to spiritual perfection. On the contrary, if one believes in God or in a creed and does not possess these four, he is no more spiritual than an ordinary man of the world. In fact, his belief is only a verbal one." The Swami was never tired of making it distinctly clear to his Western audience that the religion or philosophy taught in Vedanta is not merely an intellectual assumption, but is the result of a long and arduous search and inquiry into the ultimate principle of this universe. It is this Supreme Principle —the Unchangeable Substance—which has been expressed by human minds under various names such as God, Creator, Designer, First Cause, the Father, Jehovah, Allah, or Brahman, in different systems of thought. "If we wish to know this Ultimate Truth," said the Swami,

"we must go beyond the pale of nature and seek the explanation in the realm of the Absolute. Nature with her manifoldness deludes us and lands us in uncertainties. The scientists, even after a careful scrutiny of natural phenomena, have arrived at certain conclusions which are like conclusions in which nothing is concluded. The latest finding of science is that the ultimate goal of everything is unknown and unknowable. Here Vedanta comes to the rescue and advises its students to study not merely nature, but our Self or Atman which is beyond nature, beyond name and form, beyond multiplicity. All confusion will be removed when the Absolute Truth, as taught in Vedanta, will be realised." The Swami's learned exposition of Vedanta in the light of modern scientific knowledge carried in it such an irresistible force of appeal that he was able to enlist such adherents as would not be convinced unless shown that Huxley, Tyndall, or Spencer, or Kant agreed in substance with a particular view advanced by Vedanta.

He travelled extensively all through the United States, Alaska, and Mexico and delivered addresses on various phases of Vedanta philosophy in almost all the principal cities of America. He made frequent trips to Europe also, delivering lectures to appreciative audiences in different parts of the Continent and making contact with eminent scholars. He proved himself not only an able and efficient teacher, but furthered the success of his work in every way by his remarkable organising ability, sound judgment and well-balanced opinion, and by his power of adaptability to Western methods of work and teaching. Contemplative by nature, he was able to maintain a poise and calm even in the midst of his strenuous activities, that added grace and beauty to his

manifold works and acted with telling effect upon all who came in contact with his magnetic personality. His scholarship was the despair of many, and his intellectual brilliance, dignified bearing, as also his nobility of character, commanded loving homage from even the most aristocratic sections of the American people. Under his able leadership, the seeds sown by Swami Vivekananda on the American soil went on ever growing vigorously as days passed, striking their roots deep into the heart of the nation. Except for a short visit to India in 1906, he thus spent almost a quarter of a century in this laudable work of spreading the message of the Master in prominent centres of alien culture.

He was not only a powerful speaker, but also a prolific writer. If his spoken words moulded the lives of hundreds of persons, his printed thoughts influenced a wider circle of people in different countries. His writings contain deep philosophy with a great wealth of information couched in a very popular style. As such, they have been of immense help in broadcasting the philosophical and spiritual ideas of India. As a matter of fact, they constitute a valuable legacy to the spiritually inclined souls all the world over.

Swami Abhedananda, after a long and successful work in America, returned to India in 1921. On his way home he visited Japan, China, the Philippines, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, and Rangoon and spread the message of the Master in those places also. The Swami was now fifty-seven years old. Even at this advanced age his spirit of adventure was not diminished in the least. After reaching India he started on a long tour and went as far as Tibet and Kabul. He also visited Peshawar. the Punjab and other important places of Northern

India on his return journey and reached the Belur Math in 1923.

To carry on Vedanta work in India according to his own plan and method, he soon established a centre under the name of Ramakrishna Vedanta Society in the heart of Calcutta. Attracted by his personality, many distinguished men of the metropolis soon gathered round him and helped him in spreading the Master's message far and wide. A Bengali monthly under the name of *Vishwavâni* was soon published to facilitate his missionary activities. In fact, his soul knew no rest, and he spent the last drop of his energy for the spiritual benefit of those who came in touch with him. But this unusual strain on his nerves at this age began to tell seriously upon his health. His iron constitution broke down almost beyond cure under the pressure of work. But his weakness and ailments notwithstanding, the Swami did not lack his wonted fire and enthusiasm when he was called upon to preside over the Parliament of Religions held at the Town Hall, Calcutta, on the occasion of the Birth Centenary of Shri Ramakrishna in 1937. He rose equal to the occasion and he never forgot to emphasise in the course of his learned address the synthetic message of the Master. "The mission of Bhagavan Shri Ramakrishna", said the Swami, "was to show by his living example how a truly spiritual man, being dead to the world of senses, can live on the plane of God-consciousness. . . . For the first time it was demonstrated that all religions were like so many paths leading to the same goal, that the realisation of the same Almighty Being is the highest ideal of Christianity, Mohammedanism, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, as well as of all other religions of the world. Shri Ramakrishna's mission

was to proclaim the eternal truth that God is one but has many aspects, and that the same one God is worshipped by different nations under various names and forms ; that He is personal, impersonal, and beyond both ; that He is with name and form and yet nameless and formless." In conclusion the Swami observed, "I hope that this Parliament of Religions will sound the death-knell of all communal strife and struggle, and will create a great opportunity for promoting fellowship among various faiths." This was indeed his last public utterance and bears eloquent testimony to his deep-seated loyalty to the Master as also to the sterling stuff he was made of.

The Swami left the mortal frame on 8th September 1939, and passed into the realm of eternal bliss to enjoy a well-earned rest. The passing of such an outstanding personality from the arena of Indian life was mourned by a large number of people in India and abroad. He was one of the remarkable spiritual and cultural ambassadors of India to the outside world. His was indeed a life in which we find a happy blending of profound spirituality and a spirit of service—a life dedicated to the spiritual uplift of humanity. He came to the world in obedience to the Divine Will to fulfil the mission of the Master and after his task had been finished he went back to the Source of Light and Life from which he came.

TEACHINGS*

If you desire to have firm and unshakable faith and devotion to the Lord, you should also take to Tapasya, hard austerities. Tapasya does not mean aimless wandering hither and thither, it really means regular and steadfast Japa, meditation, and self-control.

If one prays with a yearning heart to the Lord to get devotion and faith, He grants it. So pray in this way: "O Lord, be graciously pleased to bless me with unswerving devotion and unshakable faith. May my mind and heart be ever attracted to Thy lotus feet, and may it not wander from there in any other direction."

What one seeks, that one gets. You have got what you wanted. When you really hanker after God, He will raise your mind from things of the world and grant you His vision. But as long as you are attached to the world and are strongly inclined to the things of the world can you yearn for the Lord with all your heart?

Practise to be like the kitten, calling on their mother, and remain with joy and satisfaction in the place and state in which She, the Divine Mother, puts you. Complete resignation to the will of the Divine Mother is what is wanted. You must become ever joined with the Lord wholly without any distraction. Pure and

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* These excerpts have been published by the kind permission of Ramakrishna Vedanta Math, Calcutta, from their following publications:

Spiritual Teachings of Swami Abhedananda, Tirtha-renu, and *Lectures in India.*

absolute single-minded devotion to the Lord is what you should cultivate.

Unless one has inner peace and contentment, one will find restlessness and suffering wherever one goes. Raise a wall all around your mind by your discrimination. Do not allow the distraction of external circumstances to enter your mind. Know that this is Sadhana (spiritual practice). You cannot find in the world any place after your heart. Learn to turn unfavourable circumstances into favourable ones. The mind is all in all. You cannot hear the rumbling sound of the carriage if you withdraw your mind from your ears. Keep to your helm, and pray to the Lord. He is our help and mainstay.

Know that you will not be at all tormented by mental unrest if you, without being sentimental, dedicate the good or bad results of your actions to the lotus feet of the Lord. There is no need for you to be impatient for doing Japa or meditation and flying to solitude for that purpose. Shri Ramakrishna used to say, "Meditate in a corner, or in the forest, or in the mind." The Sadhaka who lives in a city, can sit inside the mosquito curtain and easily do his Japa and meditation in the night without distraction.

Why should you be afraid of doing work ? If the mind is not purified by work, one cannot attain true knowledge. Wherever you go with your little mind, the mind will also accompany you and abide with you.

It is by the power of habit that evil thoughts rise in the mind. Form a contrary habit by continued practice, and gradually the habit of evil thoughts may not arise in the mind. Bad thoughts gain strength by association. Hence, associate with the good and give up evil company.

When the mind becomes steady by continued practice of Japa, meditation is accomplished by itself.

Realise the idea that you are the witness of the mind. Lust, anger, and other deadly enemies are the attributes of the mind, and so they cannot touch the soul. Raise your mind to the Ajna Chakra (centre between the eye-brows), and ponder over the truth that lust, anger, and the rest are not the attributes of the soul. Meditate on this idea. Repeat the great truth: "I am Brahman", and contemplate on the soul which is the witness, the inspirer, the absolute, the one without any attribute.

Your duty for the present (when you have mental unrest) is complete resignation to the will of God. Since your petty will is not being fulfilled, give it up and drift, wholly depending on His Divine will, then you will get peace.

That you are feeling the bondage of the world and finding no peace is in itself a means of progress in the spiritual world.

Realising that the work you have taken in hand is worship, keep in mind the idea that you are serving Him and dedicate the fruits of work to Him. If you practise resignation to the will of the Lord, you will get peace of mind.

Man is a slave to his passion, which is the same as desires, and desires are ever associated with selfishness. Selfishness means the desire to seek for food and raiment and happiness for oneself and one's family, without any consideration as to whether one's countrymen fare ill or well. The idea of looking on others as oneself never springs in them. This selfishness itself is ignorance. That is why any mental tendency or idea that is associated with selfishness is narrow. This keeps a man

confined within his own body or limited self, his mind never expands. He thinks that whatever is favourable to himself is good, and whatever is unfavourable is bad. Such people never get any peace in this world, their mind is ever aflame with peacelessness.

The essentials of religion are principally two: Self-knowledge and self-control. By religion I do not mean any particular doctrines, dogmas, beliefs, or faiths but I mean the realization in our daily life, in each case of the worship of the Supreme Being, which is the ideal of our religion.

Desires are of two kinds—good and bad. When desires are association with selfishness, they are bad, but when desires are motiveless or selfless, they are good. Lust, anger, and greed—these three spring from bad desires, and they harm men. The men of realisation go beyond desires. To go beyond desires means to become free from desires or hankering for results. Desires, freed from hankering for results, leads to the purification of the heart, and the knowledge of the Self dawns when the mind becomes pure. Virtue and vice reside in the mind alone. In the Self there is neither virtue nor vice. The real purpose of life is to gain self-knowledge; life is not meant for a discussion as to whether virtue or vice exists. Virtue and vice arise from desires. One can have no peace so long as one is a slave to desires. Peace arises from detachment. Peace means the conquest of desires. And the way to the conquest of desires is through doing good to others, striving for the welfare of others. Instead of thinking about oneself, one should think of others, this leads to a gradual elimination of the nervousness of mind. Purification of mind means nothing but the annihilation of the egocentric idea and removal of

selfishness from the mind. The more the mind expands, the more are the egoistic ideas annihilated. When the mind is freed from all nervousness, it becomes pure, and the knowledge of Brahman gets revealed in that pure mind.

Diverse are the desires of man, a thousand desires hide themselves behind any one of them. Thus there is no end of desires—one following the other in unending succession. That is why the enlightened ones speak of annihilating desires. Enjoyment can never destroy enjoyment, it is only through renunciation that one can go beyond enjoyment. Renunciation alone can bring peace.

Ignorance is the root of all evil. Ignorance means absence of the knowledge of the Self. Ignorance or Maya may also mean false knowledge. That is why Maya and ignorance mean the same thing. Perhaps it will lead to better comprehension if Maya is compared to a dream rather than to a mirage. For as in a dream, a man perceives many things as true, which are really false or untrue, and again perceives them just as they are when the dream is off, just so in Maya. Whatever is perceived as true in dream, is perceived as false in the waking state. As dream is known to be false in the waking state, so also the whole world is seen to be false, that is changeful, when the knowledge of the Self is attained.

To go beyond Maya, one needs discrimination and renunciation. Even Gods cannot escape Maya unless they have these two.

SWAMI ADBHUTANANDA

"Latu is the greatest miracle of Shri Ramakrishna," Swamiji once said with reference to Swami Adbhutananda. "Having absolutely no education, he has attained to the highest wisdom simply at the touch of the Master." Yes, Latu Maharaj, by which name Swami Adbhutananda was popularly known, was the peer of the Master in this respect that he was entirely innocent of the knowledge of the three R's. Nay, he even surpassed the Master in this ignorance; for whereas the Master could somehow manage to read and write, with Latu Maharaj any reading or writing was out of the question. Once Shri Ramakrishna attempted to teach young Latu how to read and write. But in spite of repeated attempts Latu pronounced the Bengali alphabet in such a distorted way that the Master, out of sheer despair gave up the attempt to educate Latu. It did not matter, however, that Latu had no book-learning. Books supply us knowledge by proxy, as it were. Latu had direct access to the Fountain-head of Knowledge. The result was that great scholars and philosophers would sit dumb at his feet to hear the words of wisdom that dropped from his lips. Shri Ramakrishna used to say that when a ray of light comes from the Great Source of all light, all book-learning loses its value. His own life bore testimony to this fact. And to some extent this could be witnessed even in the life of Swami Adbhutananda, his disciple.

The early name of Swami Adbhutananda was Rakhturam, which was shortened to Latu. He was born of humble parents in a village in the district of Chhapra

in Bihar. His early life is shrouded in obscurity. It was very difficult to draw him out on that point. As a Sannyasin, he was discreetly silent on matters relating to his home and relations. If anybody would ask him any question about his early days he would sharply answer, "Giving up all thought about God will you be busy about these trifles?" And then he would become so grave that the questioner would be awed into silence. Once a devotee expressed a desire to write a biography of Latu Maharaj. To this he raised objection saying, "What is the use of writing my life? If you want to write a biography, just write the biography of the Master and of Swamiji. That will be doing good to the world."

From the meagre details that fell from the lips of Latu Maharaj in his unguarded moments it was known that his parents were very poor—so much so that they could hardly make both ends meet in spite of their constant hard labour. Scarcely was Latu five years old when he lost both his parents. His uncle then looked after him. As ill luck would have it, Latu's uncle also had an unfortunate turn of circumstances and he had to leave his parental homestead and come to Calcutta for means of livelihood. The boy Latu also accompanied him, and after a hard struggle for some days in Calcutta got employment as a house-boy in the house of Ram Chandra Datta, who was a devotee of Shri Ramakrishna.

As a servant, Latu was hard-working and faithful, but he had a keen sense of self-respect even at that early age. Once a friend of Ram Chandra gave the indication of a suspicion that Latu might pocket some money from the amount given him for marketing. Young Rakhtu at once flared up and said in half Bengali and half Hindi words (which constituted his means of communication),

"Know for certain, sir, I am a servant but not a thief." With such firmness and dignity did he utter these words that the man was at once silenced. But he reported the matter to Ram Chandra, who, however, supported Latu rather than his friend—the boy-servant had already won the confidence of the master so much. Unsophisticated as he was, Latu was very plain-spoken, sometimes to the point of supposed rudeness. And he was no respecter of persons. As such, even the friends of Ram Chandra had sometimes to fear Latu. This characteristic, good or bad, could be seen in Latu Maharaj throughout his whole life.

Ram Chandra being a devotee, his house had a religious atmosphere and religious discussions could be heard there. This greatly influenced the mind of Latu, especially at his impressionable age. Once Latu heard Ram Babu saying, "One who is sincere and earnest about God realises Him as sure as anything", "One should go into solitude and pray and weep for Him, then and then only will He reveal Himself", and such other things. These simple words impressed Latu so much that throughout his whole life he remembered them, and often would he repeat them to others exactly as they were heard. From these words he found a clue as to how to build up his religious life, and they shaped his life. Sometimes Latu could be seen lying down, covering himself with a blanket, his eyes moistened with tears which he was wiping with his left hand. The kind ladies of the house thought that the young boy was weeping for his uncle or village association, and they would try to console him. Only the incidents of his after life indicated why Latu wept at that time.

At Ram Chandra's house, Latu heard of Shri Rama-

krishna, and naturally he felt eager to see him. And soon opportunities offered themselves to him to go to Dakshineswar and meet the Master. Ram Chandra used to send things to the Master through the boy. At the very first meeting, brought about in this way, the Master was greatly impressed with the spiritual potentiality of the boy, and Latu felt immensely drawn to the Master even without knowing anything about his greatness. The pent-up feelings of love of this orphan boy found here an outlet for expression, and he felt so very attached to Shri Ramakrishna that henceforward it was impossible for Latu to do his allotted duties with as much vigour and attention as he could command formerly. All at Ram Chandra's house noticed in him a kind of indifference to everything, but they loved him so much that they did not like to disturb him.

Shortly after Latu's meeting with the Master, the latter went to Kamarpukur and remained there for about eight months. Latu felt a great void in his heart at this absence of the one whom he loved so much. But he would still go to Dakshineswar now and then and pass some time there sad and morose. Those who knew him, but could not dive into his mind, thought he had perhaps been reprimanded for some neglect of duty at the house of Ram Chandra and had come to ease his mind. For how could they know the great anguish that torments a real devotee's heart? Latu Maharaj afterwards said, "You cannot conceive of the sufferings I had at that time. I would go to the Master's room, wander in the garden, stroll hither and thither. But everything would seem insipid. I would weep alone to unburden my heart. It was only Ram Babu who could to some extent understand my feelings, and he gave me a photo-

graph of the Master."

When the Master returned from his native village, Latu acquired a new life, as it were, and he would lose no opportunity to go to Dakshineswar to meet him. As Ram Chandra would now and then send fruits and sweets to the Master through this boy-servant of his, Latu welcomed and greatly longed for such occasions. Gradually it became impossible for Latu to continue his service. He openly expressed his desire to give up his job and remain at Dakshineswar. The members of Ram Chandra's family would poke fun at him by saying, "Who will feed and clothe you at Dakshineswar?" But with this innocent boy that was not at all a serious problem. The only thing he wanted was to be with the Master. At this time Shri Ramakrishna also felt the necessity of an attendant. And when he proposed the name of Latu to Ram Chandra, the latter at once agreed to spare him. Thus Latu got the long-wished-for opportunity of serving Shri Ramakrishna. As a mark of endearment, the Master would call him "Leto", or "Neto". But "Latu" was the name which remained current.

How service to the Guru leads to God-realisation is exemplified in the life of Latu Maharaj. He was to Shri Ramakrishna what Hanuman was to Shri Ramachandra. He did not care for anything in the world, his only concern in life was how to serve the Master faithfully. A mere wish of the Master was more than a law—a sacred injunction with Latu. Latu was once found sleeping in the evening. Perhaps he was overtired by the day's work. The Master mildly reproved Latu for sleeping at such an odd time, saying, "If you sleep at such a time, when will you meditate?" That was enough, and Latu gave up sleeping at night. For the

rest of his life, he would have a short nap in the day-time, and the whole night he would pass awake, a living illustration of the verse in the Gita: "What is night to the ordinary people is day to the Yogi."

Unsophisticated as Latu was, he had this great advantage: he would spend all his energy in action and waste no time in vain discussions. Modern minds, the sad outcome of the education they receive, will doubt everything they hear, and therefore discuss, reason, and examine to see if that be true or right. Thus so much energy is lost in arriving at the truth that nothing is left for action. It was just the opposite with Latu. As soon as he heard a word from the Master he rushed headlong to put it into practice. Afterwards he would rebuke devotees, who came to him for instruction, by saying, "You will simply talk and talk and do nothing. What's the use of mere discussions?" Of course Latu was fortunate in having a Guru in whose words there was no room for any doubt or discussion and whom it was blessedness to obey and the more implicit that obedience, the greater was the benefit that could be reaped. And Latu was a fit disciple to take the fullest advantage of this rare privilege.

When Latu came to the Master he did not bother much about the spiritual greatness of his Guru. He loved him and so he longed to be with him. But the influence of such holy association was sure to have its effect. So there began to come a gradual transformation in the life of Latu. He was fully conscious of his short-comings, and attributed all his spiritual progress to the Master. One day the Master asked him what God might be doing at the moment. Latu naturally pleaded ignorance. When thereafter the Master remarked that God

was passing a camel through the eye of a needle, Latu understood thereby, humility personified as he was, that unfit though he was, God was moulding his life to make him a proper recipient of His grace.

Many incidents are told of Latu's power of deep meditation. One day he was meditating sitting on the bank of the Ganga. Then there came the flood-tide, and waters surrounded Latu. But he was unconscious of the external world. The news reached the Master, who at once came and brought back his consciousness by loudly calling him. Another day Latu went to meditate in one of the Shiva temples just after noon. But it was almost evening, and still there was no news of Latu. The Master was anxious about him and sent some one to search for him. It was found that Latu was deeply absorbed in meditation and his whole body was wet with perspiration. On hearing this, Shri Ramakrishna came to the temple and began to fan him. After some time Latu returned to the plane of consciousness and felt greatly embarrassed at seeing the Master fanning him. Shri Ramkrishna, however, removed his embarrassment by his sweet and affectionate words. At this time, Latu was day and night in high spiritual moods. With reference to this, the Master himself once remarked, "Latu will not come down, as it were, from his ecstatic condition."

Latu loved Kirtana—congregational songs to the accompaniment of instrumental music and devotional dance. Even while at the house of Ram Chandra, if he would see a Kirtana party, he would run to join it, sometimes forgetful of his daily work. When Latu came to Dakshineswar he got greater opportunities to attend the Kirtana parties. On many occasions he would go

into ecstasy while singing with them.

A straw best shows which way the wind blows. Sometimes insignificant incidents indicate the direction of the mind of a man. One day Latu, along with others, was playing at an indoor game called "Golokdham", which term means the heavenly abode called "Golok" or "Goloka". The point aimed at by each player was that his "piece" should reach "Goloka". In the course of the play, when the "piece" of Latu reached the destination, he was so beside himself with joy that one could see that he felt as if he had actually reached the salvation of life. When Shri Ramakrishna, who was there, saw the great ecstasy of Latu, he remarked that Latu was so happy because in personal life he was greatly eager to attain liberation.

Shri Ramakrishna used to say that frankness is a virtue which one gets as a result of hard Tapasyâ in many previous births; and having frankness, one can expect to realise God very easily. Latu was so very frank that one would wonder at seeing such a childlike trait in him. He would unreservedly speak of his struggle with the flesh to the Master and receive instructions from him.

Once the Master told Latu, "Don't forget Him throughout the day or night." And of all forms of spiritual practices it seems Latu laid the greatest stress on repeating the sacred Name. This was also his instruction to others who came to him for guidance in later days. To a devotee who pathetically asked him, "How can we have self-surrender to God whom we have never seen?" Latu Maharaj said in his inimitable simple way, "It does not matter if you do not know Him. You know His name. Just take His name, and you will progress

spiritually. What do they do in an office? Without having seen or known the officer, one sends an application addressed to his name. Similarly send your application to God, and you will receive His grace."

With all his spiritual longing, Latu's chief endeavour in life was to serve the Master. Once he said in reply to one who questioned him as to how the disciples of the Master got time for worship when they were so much devoted to his service, "Well, service to him was our greatest worship and meditation."

Latu accompanied the Master as a devoted attendant when he was removed for treatment to Shyampukur and thence to Cossipore and served him till the last moment. Latu was one of the chosen twelve to whom the Master gave the Gerua cloth as a symbol of detachment. Afterwards when the actual rite for Sannyasa was performed and the family name had to be changed, Latu was named Swami Adbhutananda, perhaps because the life of Latu Maharaj was so wonderful—Adbhuta—in every respect.

After the passing away of the Master Latu Maharaj accompanied the Holy Mother to Vrindaban and stayed there for a short period. His love and reverence for the Holy Mother was next to that for the Master, if not equal. The Holy Mother also looked upon him exactly as her own child. At Dakshineswar when she had had to pass through hard days of work, Latu had been her devoted assistant. Brought up in a village atmosphere, she was very shy and would not talk with anyone outside a limited group. But as Latu was very young and had a childlike attitude towards her, she was free with him. The depth of love and devotion of Latu Maharaj to the Holy Mother throughout his whole life was amazing and beggars description.

After his return from Vrindaban, he joined the Baranagore monastery. At Baranagore, Latu Maharaj, along with other brother-disciples, passed continuously one year and a half in hard spiritual practices, in one or other form of which he would spend the whole night, and in the day-time he would have a short sleep. That became his habit for his whole life. Even if ill, he would sit for meditation in the evening. At Baranagore he was at one time very ill with pneumonia. He was too weak to rise. But he would insist that he should be helped to sit in the evening. When reminded that the doctor had forbidden him to do so, he would show great resentment and say, "What does the doctor know? It is his (the Master's) direction, and it must be done." He would be so engrossed in spiritual practices and always so much in spiritual mood that he could not stick to any regular time for food and drink. Because of this characteristic, sometimes food had to be sent to his room at the Baranagore monastery. But on many days the food that was sent in the morning remained untouched till at night. Latu Maharaj had no idea that he had not taken any meal. At night when others retired, Latu Maharaj would lie in his bed feigning sleep. When others were fast asleep, he would quietly rise and tell his beads. Once a funny incident happened on one of such occasions. While Latu Maharaj was telling his beads, a little sound was made. Swami Saradananda thought that a rat had come into the room and he kindled a light to drive it away. At this, all found out the trick that Latu Maharaj was playing on them, and they began to poke fun at him.

Latu Maharaj had his own way of living and he could not conform to the routine life of an institution. Because

of this he would afterwards live mostly outside the monastery with occasional short stays at the Alambazar or Belur Math. Swami Vivekananda once made it a rule that everyone should get up in the early hours of the morning, with the ringing of a bell, and meditate. The next day Latu Maharaj was on his way to leave the Math. Swamiji heard the news and asked Latu Maharaj what the matter was with him. Latu Maharaj said, "My mind has not reached such a stage that it can with the ringing of your bell be ready for meditation. I shall not be able to sit for meditation at your appointed hours." Swamiji understood the whole situation and waived the rule in favour of Latu Maharaj.

Sometimes Latu Maharaj stayed at the house of devotees, sometimes in a room at the Basumati Press belonging to Upendra Nath Mukherjee, a lay disciple of the Master, and very often he lived on the bank of the Ganga without any fixed shelter. The day-time he would pass at one bathing ghat, the night-time he would spend at some other ghat with or without any roof. The policeman, who kept watch, came to know him and so would not object to his remaining there at night.

One night, while it was raining, Latu Maharaj took shelter in an empty railway wagon that stood nearby. Soon the engine came and dragged the wagon to a great distance before Latu Maharaj was conscious of what had happened. He then got down and walked back to his accustomed spot. About his food Latu Maharaj was not at all particular. Sometimes a little quantity of gram, soaked in water would serve for him the purpose of a meal. He lived on a plane where physical needs do not very much trouble a man, nor can the outside world disturb the internal peace. When asked how he could

stay in a room in a printing press where there was so much noise, Latu Maharaj replied that he did not feel much difficulty.

The fact is that the main source of strength of Latu Maharaj was his dependence on the Master. He would always think that the Master would supply him with everything that he needed or was good for him. Latterly he would say to those who sought guidance from him, "Your dependence on God is so very feeble. If you do not get a result according to your own liking, in two days you give up God and follow your own plan as if you are wiser than He. Real self-surrender means that you will not waver in your faith even in the face of great losses." There was nothing in the world which could tempt Latu Maharaj away from his faith in God and the Guru.

It is very difficult to trace the chronological events of Latu Maharaj's life: first because there were no events in his life excepting the fact that it was one long stillness of prayer, and secondly because now and then he was out of touch with all. Latu Maharaj made it a point to live within a few miles of Dakshineswar, the great seat of the Master's Sadhana.' Rarely did he go farther away. In 1895 or 1896 he once went to Puri ; in 1903 he was again at that holy city for about a month ; and in the same year he visited some places of Northern India like Varanasi, Allahabad, and Vrindaban. Swamiji took him in the party on his tour in Kashmir and Rajputana. Excepting these occasions Latu Maharaj lived mostly in Calcutta or near about. Latu Maharaj prayed to Jagannath at Puri that he might be vouchsafed two boons—first that he could engage himself in spiritual practices without having a wandering habit and second that he might have a good digestion. When asked why

he asked for the second boon which seemed so strange, Latu Maharaj remarked: "Well, it is very important in a monastic life. There is no knowing what kind of food a monk will get. If he has got a good stomach, he can take any food that chance may bring, and, thus preserving his health, can devote his energy to spiritual practices."

Towards the end of 1898, when Ram Chandra Datta was on his death-bed, Latu Maharaj was by his side. For more than three weeks he incessantly nursed his old master. He took upon himself the main brunt of looking after the patient. With the same earnestness did he nurse the wife of Ram Chandra Datta, whom he regarded as his mother, in her dying moments. For about a month or so, with anxious care and unsparingly, Latu Maharaj attended her. It was only when she passed away that he left the house.

Though Latu Maharaj was never closely connected with the works of the Ramakrishna Mission, his love for his brother-disciples, especially for the leader, whom he would call "Loren" or "Loren-bhai", brother Naren, in his distorted pronunciation, was very great. Latu Maharaj could not identify himself with the works started by Swamiji as they caused distraction to the inner flow of his spiritual life. But he had great faith in one whom the Master praised so much. He used to say, "I am ready to take hundreds of births if I can have the companionship of 'Loren-bhai.'" Swamiji infinitely reciprocated the love of Latu Maharaj. When on his return to Calcutta from the West, he was given a splendid reception and everybody was eager to see and talk with him, Swamiji made anxious inquiry about Latu Maharaj; and when the latter came, he took him by his hand and asked

why he had not come for so long. Latu Maharaj with his characteristic frankness said that he was afraid he would be a misfit in the aristocratic company where the Swami was. At this Swamiji very affectionately said, "You are ever my Latu-bhai (brother Latu) and I am your Loren-bhai," and dragged Latu Maharaj with him to take their meals together. The childlike simplicity and open-mindedness of Latu Maharaj made a special appeal to his brother-disciples. Sometimes they would poke fun at him taking advantage of his simplicity. But they also had a deep regard for his deep spirituality. Swami Vivekananda used to say, "Our Master was original, and every one of his disciples also is original. Look at Latu. Born and brought up in a poor family, he has attained to a level of spirituality which is the despair of many. We came with education. This was a great advantage. When we felt depressed or life became monotonous, we could try to get inspiration from books. But Latu had no such opportunity for diversion. Yet simply through one-pointed devotion he has made his life exalted. This speaks of his great latent spirituality." Now and then Swamiji would lovingly address Latu Maharaj as "Plato" distorting the name "Lato", as pronounced by Master, into that famous Greek name, bearing indirect testimony to the wisdom the latter had attained. Sometimes the happy relationship between Latu Maharaj and his brother-disciples would give rise to very enjoyable situations. Once in Kashmir, Swami Vivekananda, after visiting a temple, remarked that it was two or three thousand years old. At this Latu Maharaj questioned how he could come to such a strange conclusion. Swamiji was in a fix and replied. "It is very difficult to explain the reasons for my conclusion to you.

It would be possible if you had got modern education." Latu Maharaj, instead of feeling abashed at this, said "Well, such is your wisdom that you cannot enlighten an illiterate person like myself." The reply threw all into roaring laughter.

In 1903 Latu Maharaj was persuaded to take up his residence at the house of the great devotee Balaram Bose. There he stayed for about nine years till 1912. A very unusual thing for Latu Maharaj! When the request for staying there came to Latu Maharaj, he at first refused on the ground that there was no regularity about his time of taking food and drink and therefore he did not like to inconvenience anyone. But the members of the family earnestly reiterated their request saying that it would be rather a blessing than any inconvenience if he put up at their house and that arrangements would be made so that he might live in any way he liked.

Even at this place where everyone was eager to give him all comforts, Latu Maharaj lived a very stern ascetic life. An eye-witness describes him as he was seen at Balaram Babu's place: "Latu Maharaj was a person of few words. He was also a person of few needs. His room bore witness to it. It lay immediately to the right of the house-entrance. The door was nearly always open, and as one passed, one could see the large empty space with a small thin mat on the floor, at the far end a low table for a bed, on one side a few half-dead embers in an open hearth and on them a pot of tea. I suspect that that pot of tea represented the whole of Latu Maharaj's concession to the body."

In this room Latu Maharaj passed the whole day almost alone, absorbed in his own thoughts. Only in the mornings and then evenings he would be found talking

with persons who approached him for the solution of their spiritual problems. Outwardly Latu Maharaj was stern and at times he would not reply though asked questions repeatedly. But when in a mood to talk and mix with people, he was amazingly free and sociable. He had not the least trace of egotism in him. Beneath the rough exterior he hid a very soft heart. Those who were fortunate in having access to that found in him a friend, philosopher, and guide. Even little boys were very free with him. They played with him, scrambled over his shoulders, and found in him a delightful companion. Persons who were lowly and despised found a sympathetic response from his kindly heart. Once asked how he could associate himself with them, he replied, "They are at least more sincere."

Once a man, tipsy with drink, came to him at midnight with some articles of food and requested that Latu Maharaj must accept them, for after that he himself could partake of them as sacramental food. A stern ascetic like Latu Maharaj quietly submitted to the importunities of this vicious character, and the man went away satisfied, all the way singing merry songs. When asked how he could stand that situation, Latu Maharaj said, "They want a little sympathy. Why should one grudge that?"

Another day a devotee came to him drenched with rain. Latu Maharaj at once gave him his own clothes to put on. The devotee got alarmed at the very suggestion of wearing the personal clothes of the much revered Latu Maharaj and also because they were ochre clothes, which it was sacrilegious for a lay man to put on. But Latu Maharaj persuaded him to wear them as otherwise he might fall ill and fail to attend the office—a very

gloomy prospect for a poor man like him.

Latu Maharaj maintained an outward sternness perhaps to protect himself against the intrusion of people. But however stern he might be externally in order to keep off people or however much he might be trying to hide his spiritual fire, people began to be attracted by his wonderful personality. Though he had no academic education whatsoever, he could solve the intricate points of philosophy or the complex problems of spiritual life in such an easy way that one felt he saw the solutions as tangibly as one sees material objects.

Once there came two Western ladies to Latu Maharaj. They belonged to an atheist society. As such, they believed in humanitarian works but not in God. "Why should you do good to others?" asked Latu Maharaj in the course of the conversation with them, "Where lies your interest in that? If you don't believe in the existence of God, there will always remain a flaw in your argument. Humanitarian work is a matter that concerns the good of society. You cannot prove that it will do good to yourself. So after some time you will get tired of doing the work that does not serve your self-interest. On the contrary, if you believe in God there will be a perennial source of interest, for the same God resides in others as in you." "But can you prove that the one God resides in many?" asked one of the ladies. "Why not?" came the prompt reply, "but it is a subjective experience. Love cannot be explained to another. Only one who loves understands it and also the one who is loved. The same is the case with God. He knows and the one whom He blesses knows. For others He will ever remain an enigma."

"How can it be possible that I am the Soul, I being

finite and the Soul being infinite?" asked a devotee. "Where is the difficulty?" replied Latu Maharaj who had the perception of the truth as clear as daylight, "Have you not seen jasmine flowers? The petals of those flowers are very small. But even those petals, dew-drops falling on them, reflect the infinite sky. Do they not? In the same way through the grace of God this limited self can reflect the Infinite."

"How can an aspirant grasp Brahman which is infinite?" asked a devotee with a philosophical bent of mind. "You have heard music," said the monk who was quite innocent of any knowledge of academic philosophy, "you have seen how the strings of a Sitar bring out songs. In the same way the life of a devotee expresses Divinity."

Once, at Baranagore Math, Swami Turiyananda, who had very deep knowledge of scriptures, was saying that God was all kind and was above any sense of hatred or partiality. At this Latu Maharaj ejaculated, "Nice indeed! You are defending God as if He is a child." "If God is not impartial," said Swami Turiyananda, "is He then a despot like the Czar of Russia, doing whatever He likes according to His caprice?" "All right, you may defend your God if you please," replied Latu Maharaj, "but this you should not forget that He is also the power behind the despotism of a Czar."

Though he had no book-learning, Latu Maharaj could instinctively see the inner significance of scriptures because of his spiritual realisations. Once a pundit was reading the *Kathopanishad*. When he read the following Shloka: "The Purusha of the size of a thumb, the inner soul, dwells always in the heart of beings. One should separate Him from the body with patience as the stalk

from a grass", Latu Maharaj was overjoyed and exclaimed, "Just the thing", as if he was giving out his own inner experience of life.

Though he himself could not read, he liked to hear scriptures read out to him. Once at dead of night—to him day and night had no difference—he awakened a young monk who slept in his room and asked him to read out the Gita to him. The young monk did so in compliance with his wish.

Latu Maharaj talked of high spiritual things when the mood for that came, but he was too humble to think that he was doing any spiritual good to anybody. Though by coming into contact with him many lives were changed, he did not consciously make any disciple. He used to say that only those persons who were born with a mission like Swami Vivekananda were entitled to make disciples or preach religion. He had a contempt for those who talked or lectured on religion without directing their energies to building up their own character. He used to say that the so-called preachers go out to seek people to listen to them, but if they realise the Truth, people of their own accord would flock around them for spiritual help. Whenever he felt that his words might be interpreted as if he had taken the rôle of a teacher, he would rebuke himself muttering half-audible words. Thus Latu Maharaj was an unconscious teacher, but the effect of his unintentional teaching was tremendous on the people who came to him.

In 1912 Latu Maharaj went to Varanasi to pass his last days in that holy city. He stayed at various places there. But wherever he lived he radiated the highest spirituality and people circled round him. Even in advanced age he passed the whole night in spiritual practices. Some-

times in the day-time also, when he lay on his bed covered with a sheet and people took him to be sleeping, on careful observation he would be found to be absorbed in his own spiritual thoughts. During the last period of his life, he would not like very much to mix with people. But if he would talk, he would talk only of higher things. He would grow warm with enthusiasm while talking about the Master and Swamiji.

Hard spiritual practices and total indifference to bodily needs told upon his once strong health. The last two or three years of his life he suffered from dyspepsia and various other accompanying ailments. Still he remained as negligent about his health as ever, and one would very often hear him say, "It is a great botheration to have a body." In the last year of his life he had a blister on his leg which developed gangrene. In the course of the last four days before his passing away, he was daily operated upon twice or thrice. But the wonder of wonders was, he did not show the least indication of any feeling of pain. It was as if the operation was done on some external thing. His mind soared high up, and even the body-idea was forgotten. Latterly he would always remain indrawn. As the last moment approached, he became completely self-absorbed. His gaze remained fixed between his brows, and his thoughts were withdrawn from the external world. Wide awake, but oblivious of his surroundings, he stood midway between the conscious and the superconscious planes, till at last the great soul was completely freed from the encagement of the body. Latu Maharaj entered into Mahasamadhi on April 24, 1920.

Those who witnessed the scene say that even after the passing, in his face there was such an expression of calm

joy, and compassion that they could not distinguish between death and the living state. Everyone was struck by that unique sight. A wonderful life culminated in a wonderful death. Indeed Shri Ramakrishna was a unique alchemist. Out of dust he could create gold. He transformed an orphan boy of lowly birth, wandering in the streets of Calcutta for a means of livelihood, into a saint who commanded the spontaneous veneration of one and all. It is said that when Latu Maharaj passed away, Hindus, Mohammedans—all, irrespective of caste or creed—rushed to pay homage to that great soul. Such was his influence!

Ah, the folly! Can one force the non-dualist's attitude on one's mind? It is a slow growth. The Master used to say, "When the fruit grows big, the flower drops of itself." Just imagine what true non-dualism means—the Master could not walk on grassy plots! Such becomes the self-identification with all things when one realises the Atman-Brahman. But one must keep sharpened one's power of discrimination between the real and the unreal, between the one and the many from the very beginning of one's Sadhana.

The Master would often say, "Don't be fascinated by the world, but go deeper and know the Architect."

They talk of God. Their talks are lip-deep. Do they really believe in Him? The Lord deals out according to one's Karma. Everyone gets his due. Really, there is no cause for worries. But man does not believe in God. So he demands more than his due. This lies at the root of all his troubles and worries. Believers remain satisfied. They depend on the Lord and enjoy contentment. One should avoid the company of the non-believers. They themselves suffer and pass on their discontent to others.

What is the use of prayer and meditation if you have no dependence on Him? Everything else is useless if you lack in this.

The Master used to say, "A Sadhu renounces all, but the idea that he is a Sadhu dogs him. He gets angry at trifling slights: 'Am I inferior to him?'" You are too eager for getting respects, which are the worst enemies

of Sadhus. If you care for spirituality, fling away all hankerings after respects.

A man of the world slaves for money. But nobody wants to do that for the Lord's sake, though there are no expenses to incur. Blessed is he who slaves for the Lord.

Apply whatever powers you may have been endowed with to good purposes and see that you do not harm anybody.

Who is more blessed than he who has dedicated his life to the service of others, who has obliterated all distinctions between mine and yours, and whose heart bleeds for others' sufferings? So hopelessly selfish we have become that we do not feel for people in difficulty, are busy with finding others' weak points, and spreading rumours, and are envious of others' happiness and prosperity. With such traits what else but misery can we expect to befall us? God is mightily pleased with those who engage themselves in serving others without an ulterior motive.

What shall I tell you—when you have already spent good fifty years of your life only to decide whether God is or is not, whether He has form or is formless? When will you undertake Japa and meditation?

He who fears and doubts cannot make any progress either in the spiritual or worldly sphere. The mind is cramped. He alone is a hero, he alone attains greatness, who moves forward to realise the truth without caring whether the world is real or not.

If you are running temperature, everything tastes bitter, you do not like sweets. Even so, so long as you have the desire to enjoy worldly things, you can have no taste for prayer, meditation, fasts, and vigils—all

taste bitter. When this worldly fever subsides, prayer, meditation, etc. taste sweet. The mind settles quickly to them. Temptation cannot sweep you off your feet.

Never talk ill of anybody, be he a devotee, a monk, or an ordinary householder, nor despise any for a wrong act. After all, everyone is a child of the Lord. Who knows today's sinning will not make him a saint tomorrow? Other acts do not count so much as a moment's love for the Lord. Blessed is he who has loved Him even for a moment. Saint or sinner, the Lord loves all.

It is a great sin to find fault with others. You will invariably find that it is such people as never do a good act themselves who easily see defects in others and energetically spread rumours.

Do you ask what happens if one believes in God and loves Him? He is rendered innocuous, he cannot do harm to anyone, this brings peace to himself and to society. There is One overhead; commit wrong, and you suffer.

As long as you suffer from a sense of want, you cannot sincerely call on God. And man has no end of wants. This sense is so peculiar that the more you think of it, the intenser and wider it becomes. Therefore it is that those who want God should tread the path of renunciation.

If there is anything really difficult, it is to practise religion. Without the Lord's grace, progress is impossible. A harsh word upsets our mind. To practise religion with such a mind! Nowadays "religion" is heard dropping from every lip. It is a rage. How many, I say, how many really want religion? With almost all it is soppy sentimentalism. But even

an imitation of religion, as they say, is good. That is all.

It is better to continue calling on the Lord devotedly than to know, speak, and preach thousand and one religious cants and shibboleths.

There are high-sounding words in all scriptures. Of what avail are they? One is to realise their truths in one's life.

This wicked mind cannot rest for a second. It is on a haphazard run in all directions. One must keep a vigilant watch over its workings, over where it goes. For this the company of holy men is very important, and prayer and meditation. Then alone does the mind slowly quiet down.

The garden and its produce belong to the master. The gardener does not own anything. Everything is the master's. But he offers the master's things to him with great devotion and humility. Everything of the world belongs to the Lord, we are His gardeners. "Thou art my Lord, and I am Thy servant"—actuated by this attitude, and with faith and devotion, we offer the Lord's things to Him. This is Dasya-Bhakti.

Cast off hypocrisy. It is because of this that you do not progress. If your devotion is genuine, there is no reason why you should not progress and realise God.

When you worship, what is needed is fixing of the mind on the Deity. What do we mean by worship? To give God's things to Him. He commits theft who takes food without offering it to Him. There's the presence of God when worship is attended by faith and devotion or else He takes to His heels.

Devotion without and duplicity within—that is too dangerous. The Lord is far, far away from such a mind.

The minds of such people are full of selfish motives. So they make no spiritual progress.

"I am and my chosen Deity is—there is nought else besides" when this attitude comes, the mind becomes purified. This is meditation.

SWAMI ADVAITANANDA

Swami Advaitananda in his pre-monastic days was known as Gopal Chandra Ghosh. He was the oldest of the monastic disciples of Shri Ramakrishna, being older than even the Master by a few years. Besides, as there were two Gopals, Shri Ramakrishna would address Swami Advaitananda as "aged Gopal", while others would call him Gopaldâ or Gopal the elder brother. His father was Govardhan Ghosh, and he was born in a village called Jagaddal in Twenty-four Parganas, but usually he lived in Sinthi near Calcutta. Gopal was an employee in a shop in Chinabazar, Calcutta, belonging to Beni Pal of Sinthi. Beni Pal was a devout Brahmo, and in the religious celebrations which he performed at his place, the Master would also occasionally be present on invitation. Perhaps it was at these meetings that Gopal first met the Master.

Gopalda was a married man. At the death of his wife he received such a great shock that he did not know what to do. A friend, who was a devotee of the Master, asked him to go to Dakshineswar, which he did. Gopalda did not profit much by the first visit, nor did he find anything very remarkable in the Master. But his friend insisted on his repeating the visit, for holy men do not often reveal themselves at once. Gopalda complied, and this time he was caught in the love of Shri Ramakrishna. As he began to frequent Dakshineswar, the overwhelming burden of his grief was completely removed. The Master's simple explanation of the unreality of the world made a deep impression on his mind,

and he began seriously to think of giving up the world in search of God. Ultimately he renounced the world and devoted himself heart and soul to the service of the Master in his last illness. He was very neat and clean and the embodiment of method and orderliness. These traits in him received great appreciation from the Master. His service to the Holy Mother was equally whole-hearted. As the bashful Mother did not talk with anyone except the old Gopalda, the young Latu, and a few others, Gopalda used to attend to her needs.

One day Gopalda expressed a desire to the Master to distribute some ochre cloths and rosaries to monks. On this the Master replied, "You won't find better monks than these young boys here. You may give your cloths and rosaries to them." Thereupon Gopalda placed a bundle of saffron cloths before the Master, who distributed them among his young disciples.[1] Thus was sown the seed of the future Ramakrishna Order.

At the Cossipore garden-house Swami Vivekananda, then Narendra Nath, when sitting one day in meditation, was lost to outer consciousness. His mind flew beyond the realm of relative consciousness and was merged in the Absolute. Gopalda became terrified and rushed to the Master to report that Narendra was dead. The Master understood that it was a case of Nirvikalpa Samadhi and assured Gopalda accordingly. After some time Narendra regained normal consciousness.

After the passing away of the Master, Gopalda had no home to go to. So, with himself and Shivananda as the first inmates, was started the monastery at Baranagore. After staying in this monastery for a few years, he went

[1] Narendra, Rakhal, Baburam, Niranjan, Yogin, Tarak, Latu, Kali, Sharat, Shashi, and Gopalda.

to Varanasi where he practised austerities for about five years. One who had the privilege of staying with him at Varanasi says that his regularity in spiritual practices was wonderful. Very early in the morning, even in the severe wintry days of Varanasi, he would get up and go to the Ganga for a bath. From there he would return shivering with cold but his mind absorbed in reciting some Sanskrit hymns. The programme of the whole day was fixed, and he would follow it without the least deviation for days, months, and years. At that holy city he lived on Madhukari. i.e., small quantities of cooked food collected from various houses, so that it might not be taxing to a single individual. Adjacent to a place where an image of Shiva was installed, he occupied a small room. But how neat and clean that small room was ! Everything kept in its proper place, the room at once gave indication of great taste and orderliness. His steadiness would cause wonder to those who watched him. He was quite indifferent to worldly sights and sounds, and followed his own tenor of life in the contemplation of the Divinity from day to day without any break.

When Swamiji returned to India and organised the Ramakrishna Brotherhood, Swami Advaitananda, the name he was given when he became a monk, returned to the Math at Alambazar. Afterwards he stayed mainly at the new monastery at Belur Math, where he looked after the management of various affairs of the monastery, specially the garden work. But all work he undertook or supervised had to be done very systematically and with scrupulous care. The young novitiates could hardly rise to his standard of perfection as regards work, and for that reason they had a very hard time with him.

Many of them would receive mild rebukes from old Gopalda, but they would take his criticisms more as a token of affection than as any indication of bitterness. Gopalda, however, would say latterly, "The Master has shown me that it is He who is manifested through all. Then whom to blame or whom to criticise?" After this experience, Gopalda ceased from finding fault with anyone however great might be the latter's errors.

Even in his old age he was self-supporting. He would not like anybody to take the trouble of attending to his personal needs.

Being the oldest in age, he was looked upon with affectionate regard by all his brother-disciples. But they also enjoyed making fun with him. Swamiji composed a comical verse in order to tease Gopalda, but that really indicated in what great esteem Gopalda was held by all.

Old Gopalda, too, had his moments of humour, though it might be at the cost of others. Swami Vijnanananda related one such incident. "He (Gopalda) and Nityananda Maharaj were staying at Belur Math with several monks and Brahmacharins. Calling them, Nityananda Swami said, 'Well, look here, come and dig up this plot of land. I shall raise brinjals and potatoes here.' They started digging up. Seeing this Gopalda said, 'Oh, what a hard labour they are put to ! Come away, all of you boys. Should they be made to work so hard?' Gopalda took them along with him. Then he told them quietly, 'You brothers dig up this plot for flower beds.' The soil of the latter plot was harder than the first. Swamiji and other monks had a hearty laugh when they heard Gopalda saying that. I am, therefore, always reminded of Gopalda when someone takes pity on another and wants to make him comfortable."

In those days of hard work, the monks knew how to lighten the burden through humour.

But Gopalda was not always successful with all. He disliked tea, while Swami Subodhananda cherished it. Gopalda warned all that if they drank tea, it would lead to dysentery. But Swami Subodhananda asserted emphatically that each drop of tea in the cup would produce a drop of blood.

After his return to the monastery, Gopalda's special duty was to look to the levelling of the newly purchased land at Belur and the repair of the old structures there. The land had been in use for repair of steamers etc. and was hence full of pits and canals. All this meant strenuous work. When the monastery became fully established there, Gopalda willingly took up the duty of looking after the comforts of the monks and producing vegetables etc. for offering to the Master.

Gopalda made strenuous efforts to mould his life according to the life and example of the Master, and would sometimes express disappointment that he fell so short of the ideal. But this feeling of disappointment indicated only his real spiritual height. Because of his age, Gopalda did not engage himself in any public activity, philanthropic, missionary, or other, so that his monastic life was quite uneventful. But so long as he was in the physical body, he definitely set an example to all, and he was the source of inspiration to many. His uniform steadfastness in Sadhana till the last days of his life elicited admiration, if not reverence, even from his brother-disciples. His love for truth was wonderful. He heard the Master say that one should not twist truth even to make fun. Gopalda obeyed this instruction in letter and in spirit and insisted on

others doing likewise.

He travelled extensively and visited, at one time or other in his life, sacred places like Kedarnath, Badrinarayan, and Hardwar in the north, Dwaraka in the west, and Rameswaram and other places in the south. He kept sound health till the good old age he lived to. After suffering for some time from stomach trouble, he passed away on 28th December 1909, at the age of eighty-one.

SWAMI TURIYANANDA

Each disciple of Shri Ramakrishna was great in his own way. Each had superb qualities which dazzled those who witnessed them. Swami Turiyananda was a blazing fire of renunciation. To be near him was to feel the warmth of his highly developed spiritual personality. From his very boyhood till the end, his life was a great fight: in the beginning it was a fight for his own spiritual evolution; during the later days, to make those who came within the orbit of his influence better. He was as if ceaselessly alert and vigilant so that everything in and around him might be the expression of the highest spirituality. Yet it meant no struggle to him; it became so very natural with him. His early life was modelled on the teachings of Shankaracharya, and those who witnessed him in later days could witness in him a living example of a Jivanmukta (free while still in the body). Swami Vivekananda once, in his characteristic way of presenting a point of view in the most emphatic and impressive manner, even belittling himself and his own achievements, said to his American disciples, "In me you have seen the expression of Kshatriya power; I am going to send to you one who is the embodiment of Brahminical qualities, who represents what a Brahmin or the highest spiritual evolution of man is." And he sent Swami Turiyananda.

Swami Turiyananda was born in a Brahmin family in North Calcutta on 3 January 1863. His family name was Harinath Chattopadhyaya. He lost his parents while very young, and was brought up by his elder brother.

He could not prosecute his studies beyond the Entrance Class as his interest lay in another direction. From a very young age, he would live like an orthodox Brahmacharin—bathing three times a day, cooking his own meal, and reciting the whole of the *Gitā* before daybreak. He was a deep student of the *Gitā*, the Upanishads, and the works of Shankarāchārya. His mind was bent towards the Advaita Vedānta, and he strove sincerely to live up to that ideal. The story goes that once when he was bathing in the Ganga, something looking like a crocodile popped up in the river, and a shout was raised around asking the bathers to run up. His first reaction was to leave the water and come to the bank for the safety of his life. At once the thought occurred to him: "If I am one with Brahman, why should I fear ? I am not a body. And if I am Spirit, what fear have I from anything in the whole world, much less from a crocodile?" This idea so much stirred his mind that he did not leave the spot. Bystanders thought he was foolishly courting death. But they did not know that he was testing his faith in Advaita philosophy. The purpose of his life was to be a Jivanmukta. He himself once said that the first time he read the verse in which it is said that life is meant for the realisation of Jivanmukti, he leaped in joy. For that was the ideal he was aiming at.

The scriptures say that if a man is sincere he meets with his spiritual guide unsought for. Harinath also met with his Master unexpectedly and without knowing it. He was then a boy of thirteen or fourteen. He heard that a Paramahamsa (a Sannyasin of the highest order—a realised soul) would come to a neighbouring house. Out of curiosity, he went to see the Paramahamsa. This

Paramahamsa was no other than Shri Ramakrishna, who afterwards played a great part in moulding his life. To give the version of Swami Turiyananda himself: "A hackney carriage with two passengers in it stopped in front of the house. A thin emaciated man got down from the carriage supported by another man. He appeared to be totally unconscious of the world. When I got a better view of him, I saw that his face was surrounded with a halo. The thought immediately flashed in my mind, 'I have read about Shukadeva in scriptures. Is this then a man like him?' Supported by his attendant, he walked to the room with tottering gait. Regaining a little consciousness of the world, he saw a large portrait of Kali on the wall and bowed his head before it. Then he sang a song depicting the oneness of Krishna and Kali which thrilled the audience."

He met Shri Ramakrishna again at Dakshineswar two or three years afterwards. Soon he became passionately devoted to the Master and began to see him as often as he could. The Master asked Harinath to come to him avoiding holidays, when there was a large assemblage of visitors. Thus Harinath found an opportunity to talk very freely and intimately with the Master, who was rather surprised to know from young Hari that his favourite book was the *Rāma-Gitā*, an Advaita treatise. In course of conversation one day, Harinath told the Master that he found great inspiration while he visited Dakshineswar, whereas in Calcutta he felt miserable. To this appealing statement of the young disciple, the Master said, "Why, you are a servant of the Lord Hari, and His servant can never be unhappy anywhere." "But I don't know that I am His servant", remonstrated the boy. The Master reiterated, "Truth does

not depend upon anybody's knowledge of it. Whether you know it or not, you are a servant of the Lord." This reassured Harinath.

From an early age Harinath had an abhorrence of women. He did not allow even little girls to come near him. One day in answer to an inquiry from the Master on this subject he said, "Oh, I cannot bear them." "You talk like a fool!" said the Master reprovingly, "Look down upon women! What for? They are the manifestation of the Divine Mother. Bow down to them as to your mother and hold them in respect. That is the only way to escape their influence. The more you hate them, the more you will fall into the snare." These fiery words penetrated into the heart of Harinath and changed his entire outlook on women.

One day Harinath asked the Master how one could completely get rid of the sex-idea. The reply was that one had no need to think in that line. One should try to think of positive ideas, of God, then only one would be free from any sex-idea. This was a new revelation to the young boy.

We have said that Harinath was a deep student of Vedanta and tried to mould his life according to its teachings. Once he happened to keep away from Dakshineswar for a longer time than usual. When he came next, the Master told Harinath, "They say you are studying and meditating on Vedanta nowadays. It is good. But what does the Vedanta philosophy teach? 'Brahman alone is real and everything else is unreal'—isn't that its substance, or is there anything more? Then why don't you give up the unreal and cling to the Real?" These words pin-pointed the main theme of Vedanta in such a clear way that they turned the

thoughts of Harinath in a new fruitful direction.

A few days later, the Master went to Calcutta and sent for Harinath ; when he came, he found the Master in a state of semi-consciousness. "It is not easy to see the world of phenomena as unreal", the Master began addressing the assembled devotees: "This knowledge is impossible without the special grace of God. Mere personal effort is powerless to confer this realisation. A man is after all a tiny creature, with very limited powers. What an infinitesimal part of truth can he grasp by himself!" Harinath felt as if these words were directed to him, for he had been straining every nerve to attain illumination by personal effort. The Master then sang a song eulogising the miraculous power of divine grace and decrying egotism. Tears flowed down his cheeks, literally wetting the ground. Harinath was deeply moved. He too burst into tears. After that, he learnt to surrender himself at the feet of the Lord.

Shri Ramakrishna loved Harinath dearly. In order to induce Harinath to be more regular in his visits to Dakshineswar, the Master appealed to him thus in a voice chocked with emotion, "Why don't you come here? I love to see you all because I know that you are God's special favourites. Otherwise what can I expect from you ? You have not the means to offer me a pice worth of presents, nor have you a tattered mat to spread on the floor when I go to your house. And still I love you so much. Don't fail to come here (meaning himself), for this is where you will receive everything. If you are sure to find God elsewhere, go there by all means. What I want is that you realise God, transcend the misery of the world, and enjoy divine beatitude. Anyhow try to attain it in this life. But the Mother tells me that you

will realise God wihout any effort if you only come here. So I insist upon your coming." As he spoke thus he actually wept.

It is needless to say Harinath also had extraordinary veneration for the Master. In later days when he was severely suffering from various physical ailments, he once remarked that the bliss he had got in the company of the Master more than compensated for all the suffering he had had in his whole life. After the passing away of the Master when the monastery at Baranagore had been established, Harinath joined it in 1887 at the age of twenty-four years. After formally accepting the vow of lifelong monasticism, his new name became Swami Turiyananda, though he was popularly known as Hari Maharaj.

The Sannyasin-like love for freedom made some of these young monks feel that they must go out in the wide world depending solely on God and gathering spiritual experiences from the hardships and difficulties of life. Hari Maharaj also left the shelter of the Baranagore Math and for years travelled on foot from one holy city to another, practising the most rigorous austerity. He had often scarcely the barest necessities about him—at times not even a blanket. The severe winter of Northern India he passed with a cotton Chaddar, and for his food he had what chance might bring. He travelled through the Uttar Pradesh and stayed for some time at Rajpur, near Dehra Dun, and it was here that an astrologer told him he would soon meet one whom he most liked. In a day or two he, to his great surprise, met Swami Vivekananda, who was accompanied by some other Gurubhais. Hari Maharaj joined the party and practised Tapasya at Rishikesh, the

famous retreat of monks, a few miles above Hardwar. After Swamiji had recovered from the severe fever which he had here, he went to Meerut to recoup his health, and from there to Delhi. Hari Maharaj was also one of the party which accompanied him. Hari Maharaj again travelled with him from Bombay to Abu Road, when the latter was about to depart for America in 1893. He used to say later that from the radiant form of Swamiji he could at once judge that he had perfected himself in Sadhana and was ready to impart to mankind the results of his experience. At Bombay Swamiji told Swami Turiyananda, "Haribhai (brother Hari, by which affectionate name he called him), I don't know what I have gained by austerities and spiritual practices, but this I find, that from the experience of travel throughout India my heart has expanded. I feel intensely for the poor, the afflicted, the distressed people of India. Let me see if I can do anything for them."

Talking of his days of itineracy, he once said, "Though I travelled much, I also studied much all along. At Vrindaban I studied a great deal of Bhakti scriptures. It is not good to wander much if you do not at the same time continue your Sadhana.

"In the Jagannath temple at Puri, suddenly a sound came to my ears and my heart was filled with great joy so much so that I felt like walking in the air. The sound continued in various strains. My whole mind felt attracted. I then remembered what I had heard of Anahata Dhvani (music of the spheres, as it is called), and I thought it must be that.

"At Ujjain I was one night sleeping under a tree. A storm came and suddenly some one touched me on the

body. I got up, and just then a branch fell where I had slept."

Sometime during this period, he visited the celebrated Himalayan shrines of Kedarnath and Badrinarayan, and he stayed for a period at Srinagar (Garhwal). Talking of the days in Garhwal, Hari Maharaj once said, "I was continuously in an exalted mood. My only idea was to realise Him. I not only committed to memory eight Upanishads, but used to be absorbed in the meaning of each Mantra." He also prayed to the Divine Mother at this time with eyes soaked in tears that all book-learning might be wiped off from his mind. For the thing which he wanted was God-realisation and not dry intellectualism. He was a master of his senses, and once he sat down to meditate, external troubles could not reach the inner sanctuary of his mind. He spoke of this later to a monk of the Ramakrishna Order, "When I sit down for meditation, I lock the entrances to my mind, and after that nothing external can reach there. When I unlock them, then only can the mind cognise things outside." On another occasion to a young Sannyasin he remarked, "Write in big characters on the doors of your mind 'No Admission'—and no outside disturbance will trouble you during meditation. It is because you allow outside things to disturb you that they have access to your mind." During this wandering life one day he had a very interesting experience. While he was travelling from place to place on foot, the thought began to torment him that whereas everyone was doing something in this world, he was living only a useless vagrant life. He could not shake off this thought however much he tried. At last it became so oppressive to him that he threw himself down under a tree. There he fell asleep

and had a dream. He saw himself lying on the ground, and then he saw that his body began to expand in all directions. It went on expanding and expanding till it seemed to cover the whole world. Then it occurred to him: 'See how great you are, you are covering the whole world. Why do you think your life is useless? A grain of Truth will cover a whole world of delusion. Get up, be strong, and realise the Truth. That is the greatest life.' He awoke and jumped up, and all his doubts vanished.

In some parts of his travels in the Uttar Pradesh and the Punjab, he was accompanied by Swami Brahmananda. At this time Swamiji was writing from America to his brother-disciples to meet together and organise themselves into a band for the spread of the message of the Master. At first Swami Turiyananda did not pay any heed to such an idea. His love for a life of Tapasya was too great for him to think of anything else. But at long last he responded to the call and returned to the Math which was then at Alambazar. Swami Vivekananda had a great admiration for this brother-disciple. In a letter from America he wrote in 1895, "Whenever I think of the wonderful renunciation of Hari, about his steadiness of intellect and forbearance, I get a new access of strength!" Swami Turiyananda's love for Swamiji also was unique. He would be ready to sacrifice anything for one whom the Master dubbed as the leader of the party.

At the Alambazar Math, Hari Maharaj, at the suggestion of Swamiji, took upon himself the task of training the novitiates of the Order. He began to help them in meditation and in studying the scriptures like the *Gitā*, the Upanishads, etc. He began to take public classes

as well in North Calcutta. In 1899, when Swami Vivekananda started for America for the second time, he persuaded Swami Turiyananda to accompany him for the American work. Hari Maharaj being a man of meditation was averse to the life of public preaching. So Swamiji found it heard, in the beginning, to persuade him to go to America. When all arguments failed, Swami Vivekananda put his arms round his neck and actually wept like a child as he uttered these words: "Dear Haribhai, can't you see I have been laying down my life, inch by inch, in fulfilling this mission of the Master, till I am on the verge of death! Can you merely look on and not come to my help by relieving me of a part of my great burden?" Swami Turiyananda was overpowered and all his hesitation gave way to the love he bore for the leader.

They reached New York via England towards the end of August, 1899. Hari Maharaj worked at first at the Vedanta Society of New York, and then he took up additional work at Mont Clair—a country town, about an hour's journey from New York. Both at New York and Mont Clair the Swami made himself beloved of all. He carried the Indian atmosphere about him wherever he went. When he came to America, he said to Swamiji that platform work was not in his temperament. At this Swamiji told him that if he lived the life, that would be enough. Yes, Swami Turiyananda lived the life. Intensely meditative, gentle, quiet, unconcerned about the things of the world, Swami Turiyananda was a fire of spirituality. His very presence was a superb inspiration. He did not care much for public work and organisation. He was for the few, not for big crowds. His work was with the individual—character-

building. And the greatest scope for work in this line he got when he lived with a group of students in the Shanti Ashrama at California.

A Vedanta student of New York, feeling the great need of a Vedanta retreat in the West where the students could live like Indian Sannyasins, offered to Swami Vivekananda a homestead in California—160 acres of free Government land—situated in San Antone Valley, about forty miles from the nearest railway station and market. The place was naturally very solitary, and in addition it commanded a very beautiful scenery. Far, far away from human habitation, the place stretched out in a rolling, hilly country. Oak, pine, chaparral, chamisal, and manzanita covered part of the land, the other part was flat and covered with grass. Swamiji accepted the gift and sent Hari Maharaj to open an Ashrama there.

From New York Swami Turiyananda went first to Los Angeles and stayed there for a short while. Teaching and talking and holding classes, the Swami became popular in Los Angeles. But he could not stay there in spite of the earnest entreaties of the students, for he had come for other work. From Los Angeles he went to San Francisco, and stayed there for some time before he actually started for the Shanti Ashrama. It was at San Francisco that Swamiji had told the students, "I have only talked, but I shall send you one of my brethren who will show you how to live what I have taught." The students eagerly longed for the coming of the Swami about whom Swami Vivekananda spoke so highly, and naturally they expected much of him. Their expectation was more than fulfilled, for in Swami Turiyananda they found a living embodiment of Vedanta. During his

short stay at San Francisco, Hari Maharaj gave a great impetus to the students who had formed themselves into the Vedanta Society of San Francisco.

With the first batch of a dozen students he one day left San Francisco for his future work in the San Antone Valley. When the party arrived there, many initial difficulties presented themselves. Except for one old log cabin, there was no shelter. Water had to be brought from a long distance. But the enthusiasm of the students at the prospect of a future Ashrama was unbounded. Gradually things took shape. Tents were pitched, a well was dug, and a meditation cabin was erected. Though the students were accustomed to the comforts of city life—some of them bred up in wealth and luxury—they all braved any difficulty that came in the way. Soon they were in a position to devote their individual attention to spiritual practices.

At this place Swami Turiyananda lived in one of his most intense spiritual moods—day and night talking only of God and the Divine Mother and allowing no secular thought to disturb the atmosphere of the Ashrama. The minds of the students were constantly kept at a high pitch through classes in meditation, the study of scriptures, and so on. With the Swami there was no special time for instruction. He was always in such an exalted mood that to any topic he would spontaneously, and unconsciously as it were, give a spiritual turn. There was no set of definite rules for the Ashrama, but the very life of the Swami was so very inspiring that everything in the Ashrama went on in an orderly and systematic way. Once a student actually asked Hari Maharaj to formulate a set of rules and regulations. "Why do you want rules?" the Swami said, "Is not

everything going on nicely and orderly without formal rules? Don't you see how punctual everyone is, how regular we all are? The Divine Mother has made Her own rules, let us be satisfied with that. We have no organisation, but see how organised we are. This is the highest organisation: it is based on spiritual laws."

In later days it was found that his method of chastisement was unique. He had a very loving heart, but usually he would keep his emotions under control and not give free play to them. Therefore a little reserved or a slightly apathetic attitude on his part helped to set the delinquent right. Once, to a young monk who was laughing loudly to the disturbance of others in an Ashrama in India, the Swami said by way of reproof, "Well, have you realised God, have you attained life's goal, that you can give yourself up so whole-heartedly to laughter?" A man of God as he was, he could not but talk in that strain even while scolding. Once interrogated by a curious student as to how men and women of pronounced and different temperaments were living so peacefully together in the Shanti Ashrama, the Swami said, "As long as we remain true to the Mother there is no fear that anything will go wrong. But the moment we forget Her, there will be great danger. Therefore I always ask you to think of the Mother." In those days the word "Mother" was constantly on his lips. Referring to this period, he once remarked, "I could palpably see how Mother was directing every single footfall of mine."

At times fiery exhortation came from the Swami to the students to make God-realisation the only aim of life. "Clench your fists and say: I will conquer! Now or never—make that your motto, even in this life I must see God", the Swami would exhort. "That is the only

way. Never postpone. What you know to be right, do that and do that at once, do not let any chance go by. The way to failure is paved with good intentions. That will not do. Remember, this life is for the strong, the persevering: the weak go to the wall. And always be on your guard. Never give in."

Shri Ramakrishna used to say, "If a cobra bites a man, its poison will have sure effect; in the same way, if a man comes in contact with a really spiritual person, his life is sure to be changed." Those who came in touch with Swami Turiyananda or received training under him, were transformed—metamorphosed. In America as well as in India many are the persons whose outlook on life entirely changed because of his influence. Afterwards he used to say, "If I can put a single life on the path of God, I shall deem my work a great success." Certainly the number of persons whose thoughts turned Godwards because of his living example is large. A student who was with him at the Shanti Ashrama writes: "To think of Swami Turiyananda is an act of purification of the mind; to remember his life, an impulse to new endeavour."

But to transform lives is not an easy task. Especially to change the outlook of those who are brought up in a different culture and tradition and are born with diverse tendencies of past lives is an arduous work. As such Swami Turiyananda had a very strenuous life at the Shanti Ashrama, so much so that his health broke down within the short period of two years.

Swami Turiyananda badly required a change for his health. It was therefore decided that he should come to India—at least for a visit, especially as he was very eager to see the leader—Swami Vivekananda. But

before he reached Calcutta, the tragic news reached him that Swamiji had passed away. This news gave him such a great shock that a few days after he had arrived at Belur Math, he again started for North India to pass his days in Tapasya. For about eight years he practised severe spiritual disciplines—staying at various places like Vrindaban, Garhmukteswar in Dt. Bulandshahr, Uttarkashi in Tehri State, and Nangal, some sixty miles below Hardwar. Except at Vrindaban, he lived alone and begged his food, though his health was indifferent and he needed help. A Brahmacharin went to serve him at Nangal, but he would not allow him to do so, saying, "Ganga-water is my medicine, and Narayana is my doctor." He realised this idea so tangibly in his life that he felt absolutely no necessity for any other help and care. Afterwards he used to say that when he was unwell at Nangal, at first he made a deliberate effort to live to the above principle, but soon it became quite natural with him. While at Vrindaban, he was joined by Swami Brahmananda, the then President of the Ramakrishna Mission who had taken temporary leave from work for Tapasya, and they both lived together performing intense spiritual practices.

After coming from America, he no longer engaged himself in any active work, excepting that with the co-operation of Swami Shivananda he built an Ashrama at Almora. Even there, the Ashrama grew as a by-product, as they stayed there only to perform Tapasya.

As a result of severe austerities, his health was being undermined. But still he would not desist. His motto was, "Let pain and body look to themselves, but you, my mind, rest in the contemplation of God." About the year 1911 he developed symptoms of diabetes, which

began to increase with the lapse of years. As a result of this, he got a carbuncle on his back, for which he had to be operated several times. Strange to say, in none of the operations did he allow himself to be under chloroform; and the surgeons themselves wondered at such a thing. He had the wonderful capacity to dissociate his mind from the body-idea, and so he did not feel the necessity for any chloroform. But he also had extraordinary fortitude as well as living faith in God; so it was easy for him to bear any amount of bodily suffering. Once, when he had an eye-complaint, nitric acid was applied to one of his eyes through mistake. When the mistake was found out and everybody got alarmed, he simply smiled and said, "It is the will of the Mother." Fortunately the eye was saved.

The last three and a half years of his life he stayed at the Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama at Varanasi, where he passed away on 21st July 1922. His death was as wonderful as his life was exemplary. The day before his passing, the Swami said all of a sudden, "Tomorrow is the last day. Tomorrow is the last day." But none could realise the meaning of these words just then. Next morning when Swami Akhandananda came to see him, Hari Maharaj said to him, "We belong to the Mother and the Mother is ours. Repeat, repeat." This he himself repeated a number of times. He then made obeisance to the Divine Mother reciting the well-known Mantra beginning with सर्वमंगलमंगल्ये (salutation to the Divine Mother—the source of all beneficence and bliss). This he repeated in the noon and also in the afternoon. In the afternoon he insisted on being helped to sit in a meditation posture. But as his strength gave way he could not remain sitting; and much against his

wishes he was forced to lie down in bed. Then he said: "The body is falling off—the Pranas are departing. Make the legs straight and raise my hands." The hands being raised, he joined the palms and made repeated salutations uttering the name of the Master. And then he suddenly spoke out as if realising Brahman in everything; "This creation is Truth (सत्यम्). This world is Truth. All is Truth. Prana is established in Truth." Then he recited the Vedic Mantras, सत्यं ज्ञानमनन्तं ब्रह्म प्रज्ञानमानन्दं ब्रह्म। He asked to have these repeated; and Swami Akhandananda recited them. Hearing this ultimate Truth of the Upanishads, the Swami said, "That is enough", and entered into Mahasamadhi. It seemed as though he quietly passed into sleep. Not a sign of pain or distortion was visible on his person. His face became aglow with a divine beauty and an unspeakable blessedness. Those who witnessed the incident could not but come to the conclusion that life and death for such a soul were like going from one apartment to another.

Swami Turiyananda began life with a firm belief in the utility of self-exertion, but ended in perfect resignation to the Divine will. His self-surrender was, however, no less dynamic than his early impetuosity to storm the citadel of God. These two attitudes may seem contradictory. But he himself explained how they are not. Birds fly about in the infinite sky on and on till they are tired and weary, then they sit on the mast of a ship for rest. The same is the case with a man who believes in self-exertion. He strives and strives, knocks and knocks, but with every striving his egotism receives a blow till at last it is completely smashed, and he realises that the Divine Mother is everything. But to reach that ultimate

stage one must struggle sincerely and earnestly. There should be no self-deception in spiritual life. Because people forget that surrender to the Divine Will becomes identified with a drifting life of inertia in the case of many.

Once he experienced that the Divine Mother actually wiped off any trace of egotism in him. And he used to say, pointing to his heart, "The Mother is wide awake here and not asleep." In the course of conversation he once gave out, "At one time I felt that every footstep of mine was through Her power and that I was nothing. I clearly felt this. This feeling lasted for some days."

There was another aspect of his self-surrender to the Divine Mother. It made him absolutely free from any fear. People who talk glibly of Divine Will and all that are found, more often than not, to be timid and victims of false, if not hypocritical, humility. But the case was just the opposite with Hari Maharaj. He did not know what it was to fear. During the Terrorist Movement in Bengal the police were after many monks living in North India. Hari Maharaj was then at Dehra Dun. A police officer of high rank was after him incognito. Once he asked the Swami whether he was afraid of the police, as evidently some monks were. They were out for a walk. On hearing those words, the Swami at once halted, looked at the man behind and with eyes emitting fire, as it were, said: "I do not fear even Death, why should I fear any human being? In the whole life I have done no crime, what reason have I to fear the police?" The words were uttered with so much strength and firmness that the man looked small. He felt so much awed by the greatness of the personality that stood before him, that he touched the feet of the Swami and

apologised. Afterwards he became an admirer and devotee of Hari Maharaj.

Even in the complete self-effacement of Swami Turiyananda before the Divine Mother, how energetic he was ! He was a man of uncompromising attitude. Whatever he would do, he would apply the whole strength of his soul to it. One found him always sitting erect—even in his illness, even while on an easy chair, he would never bend his body. This simple physical characteristic represented, as it were, his mental attitude. He was unbending in not allowing Maya to catch him. In his self-exertion as well as in his self-surrender one would find a great spiritual force intensely active in him.

When he was in any of the Ashramas or Maths, he would hold classes or inspire people for a higher life through conversation. He was a great conversationalist. But his conversation was always full of great spiritual fervour. In it flowed quotations from the *Gita*, Upanishads, Tulsidas, Kabir or Nanak as also from the Bible. Once asked as to how his conversation was so spontaneous and at the same time of a high level of spiritual quality, the Swami said, "Well, from my childhood I have lived that life intensely."

Not a few received spiritual impetus in their lives through his letters. Not being able to be with him personally, these devout souls had correspondence with him regarding their spiritual difficulties. And the letters he wrote in reply would always wield a tremendous influence upon their lives. These letters indicate his clear thinking, vast scholarship, and more than that, his spiritual vision. Once asked as to how his answers to the questions became so effective, the Swami said: "There are two ways of answering a question—one is to

answer from the intellect, the other is to answer from within. I always try to answer from within."

Thus though not actively engaged in any philanthropic work, the life of Hari Maharaj was of tremendous influence to many. He had a remarkable breadth of vision. In him there was the synthesis of Jnana, Karma, Yoga, and Bhakti and many things more. That was perhaps the main reason why all classes of people were attracted to him. He greatly eulogised the Seva work as inaugurated by Swamiji. Though he himself spent his whole life in intense spiritual practices in the form of meditation and contemplation, he used to say, "If one serves the sick and the distressed in the right spirit, in one single day one can get the highest spiritual realisation." Even while in his very death-bed, he exhorted a fagging monk with the words: "Don't doubt. Do the work started by Swamiji in the right spirit. From that itself will come Samâdhi or any other supreme spiritual attainment. Have no doubt. Plunge headlong into work. Swamiji once told me, 'Haribhai, I have chalked out a new path to God-realisation. So long people thought that salvation could be had only through prayer, meditation, and the like. But now my boys will attain the bliss of liberation-in-life by mere selfless work.' So have no doubt. It is his charge."

He had a feeling heart. He felt for the masses of India and encouraged all forms of philanthropic work. He was in close touch with all current events, and took great interest in the movement started by Mahatma Gandhi, for in this he found the promise for the sunken millions of India.

His devotional side was very marked. He used to visit shrines as often as he could, and devotional songs

always had a telling effect upon him. His chanting of sacred texts on special holy occasions was a thing to enjoy—such a devotional attitude and such perfect intonations one could seldom meet with.

We cannot do better than conclude this article in the Swami's own words: "I have done what one, being born a man, should do. My aim was to make my life pure. I used to read a great deal, eight or nine hours daily. I read many Puranas and then Vedanta, and my mind settled on Vedanta. When I first read the verse in which it is said that life is meant for the realisation of Jivanmukti (freedom in this very life), I leapt in joy, for that indeed was the purpose of my life."

There are several obstructions to concentration: Laya, Vikshepa, Kashaya, Rasasvada. Laya is the mind being overcome by Tamas (inertia)—the mind falls asleep and loses consciousness. Most aspirants are held down by Laya. Vikshepa is the scattering of the mind on multifarious objects. Kashaya is finding meditation distasteful—one feels disinclined to meditate. But one must still persist. Rasasvada is the mind being fascinated by the vision of divine forms and refusing to ascend higher.

Never pride yourself on your having gained control over the passions. If you do, they will at once raise their heads. Ever pray to Him, "O Lord, save me from them."

Meditate on His lotus-feet, the senses will withdraw of themselves and the mind lose itself in Him.

Freedom can be realized in two ways, by identifying oneself with Him and by living in eternal self-surrender to Him. There can be no freedom of will away from Him. Nothing succeeds unless He wills it. Reliance on one's apparent self leads to ruin. To presume to be all-knowing is extremely harmful. Self-reliance or self-confidence means faith in the Higher Self. To persist in remaining what one already is or in holding on to one's pre-conceived opinions at any cost—such self-importance is bad.

Nothing short of complete self-surrender to Him will do. You call Him the Inner Controller (Antar-yamin), omniscient, and omnipresent, and yet you are afraid to surrender yourself to Him!

Do you ask, "Will not the Lord do anything for His devotee?" Yes, He will. But you will have to become a devotee first, you must learn to feel devotion for Him. And devotion, Bhakti, is no trifling thing. You have to give Him your mind, life, everything. If you do not do that for God, why should He do anything for you? Little does He care! If you feel miserable for want of Him, know that He is very near to you—you will soon have His vision, you will soon attain infinite bliss.

At first we also thought Nirvana to be the highest state of realization. How often the Master rebuked us for this! He used to say that it was a mean conception. I would be amazed to hear him call Nirvana a mean conception.

He who wants Nirvana laboriously works his way to the goal, ever anxiously protecting himself against the world. But is it not better to be afraid of nothing? The Master used to say that he could not bear the sight of egotistic persons. Those who go to God without seeking Nirvana are Ishvarakotis (belong to the divine class).

Mukti is nothing but giving up seeking advantage.

The Master one day was asked if the disease in his throat hurt him. The Master replied: "What foolish things you say! Does the body ever attain sainthood? It is the mind that becomes such." Unless the mind remains unaffected, a mere spartan-like fortitude does not count much ; you feel the pain, only you suppress its outward expression. If you feel that all pains and suffering are of the body, not your own, and that you are separate from the body, only then you are right.

Mere suppression of passions helps little. There must be a high ideal along with self-restraint. Without a

high ideal, the passions will find another outlet. You must give them a new direction, then you will be automatically rid of them. "Take refuge in Me and control the senses." As for example lust. The Master explained: "What is lust? It is the desire to get. Then desire to get Him, and strengthen this desire greatly."

Never expect anything from anyone. But always give. Otherwise a sense of dryness will overtake you. But you must not give your mind to anyone. That you must give only to God.

The Jnanis meditate in the head, the Bhaktas in the heart. We generally find so. But when as a result of meditation in the heart, spiritual consciousness expands, there is no more any fixed location of meditation.

Meditation begins with the unification of the meditator, the object of meditation, and the act of meditation, when the idea of separation among them is obliterated. When Japa has become automatic, when a portion of the mind ever repeats the Name of itself, one may be said to have advanced a little in Japa. In all cases the "I" must be forgotten.

You cannot build up life without the living touch of an ideal life. The *Bhagavata* is always insisting on the company of the good and the devout. Shankara has no doubt laid particular stress on the Jnana (knowledge) aspect. But Vedanta also upholds the necessity of a spiritual teacher. Life can be kindled only from another life. Indeed the lives of seers are the proof and demonstration of the scriptures.

The Jiva is bound. Like a tethered cow he is free to a certain extent only, not fully. But he is emancipated if he utilizes that limited freedom in a proper way. He does not do it, but rather abuses it in various ways.

They think that inaction in itself is the ideal. If it be so, why then, the wall also should be considered to have attained Samādhi. Should not one transcend all dualities? To maintain one's mental balance under all circumstances, to remain absolutely unmoved—that indeed is the goal!

"Worship of Narayana"—how exquisite! This is the characteristic of the present age. Meditation and work, both are excellent if properly done. They are equally good.

The idea once prevailed that Swamiji has preached differently from Shri Ramakrishna. That idea is considerably discredited now.

They say that work binds. Well, if it binds, it also unbinds. Selflessly done, it leads to salvation. What kind of meditation is this—half an hour in the morning and half an hour in the evening! Must not there be an uninterrupted flow throughout the day?

Work done in the spirit of service can lead one as surely to the goal as meditation and Japa.

SWAMI TRIGUNATITANANDA

The family name of Swami Trigunatitananda was Sarada Prasanna Mitra. He was born in an aristocratic family of Twenty-four Parganas on 30th January 1865. His parents believed that Sarada was born to them through the grace of the Divine Mother Durgâ, and therefore they named the child after Her.

For education Sarada was sent to Calcutta. As a student he showed great brilliance, and by his charming behaviour and sweet manners, he endeared himself to all. While a boy of fourteen, he was admitted into the fourth class of the Metropolitan Institution of Shyampukur where Mahendra Nath Gupta or 'M'., the great devotee of Shri Ramakrishna, was the headmaster ; and he passed the Entrance Examination from there. Everybody expected that Sarada would pass the examination with great distinction and win prizes and scholarships, but fate was against him. Sarada lost his gold watch on the second day of the examination through some carelessness. This so much upset him that he could no longer normally write examination papers, and he passed in the second division to the great disappointment of all. This made Sarada so grief-stricken, that for weeks together he kept sorrowing over his lot.

'M.' loved Sarada dearly. Finding his favourite boy so much depressed in spirits, he one day (27th December 1884) took Sarada to Shri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar. Thus a trifling thing like the loss of a gold watch became the indirect cause of great future events. A pure soul

like Sarada was at once attracted towards the saint of Dakshineswar, and he began to go to him whenever he could make time.

From his very boyhood Sarada showed a rare religious disposition and found delight in worship etc. In this he was greatly helped by his father who spent the greater portion of his day in spiritual practices. Sarada began to read scriptures, and so retentive was his memory that even at an early age he learnt by heart more than a hundred Sanskrit hymns. The contact with the Master further stimulated his religious spirit, and the Master also kept a keen eye on the training of his boy devotee.

Brought up in the atmosphere of an aristocratic family, Sarada looked upon some works as reserved only for menials. But one hot day when Sarada had arrived at Dakshineswar, the Master asked the boy to bring water and wash his feet. There were many friends of Sarada standing near, which made the situation all the more embarrassing. Sarada's face became flushed with a sense of humiliation. He did not know what to do. But the Master definitely asked him again to do the work. There was no other way. Sarada willy-nilly obeyed. But this incident for ever broke down the feeling of aristocracy in the innocent boy and implanted in him a spirit of service.

Sarada now joined the Metropolitan College. In the first year he prosecuted his studies regularly and acquired a name as a bright student, but as his visits to Dakshineswar became more and more frequent, Sarada began to show growing indifference to secular learning. His parents became alarmed at this. They thought marriage might give a turn to his mind, and without his knowledge made all arrangements for it. But as soon

as Sarada got the scent of this, he fled away from the house.

He first went to see the Master to tell him of his plan to go to Puri on foot, carefully suppressing the fact that he had left the house without the knowledge of his parents. On the way to Puri he had varied experiences. Once for two days he was without food. Hungry and tired, he walked on. He thought he would find some village in the evening. But to his utter dismay he found himself in a deep forest, and deeper became the forest as he advanced. In that helpless condition he took shelter in the branches of a tree for the night But when he was asleep, he was called by a stranger and given food. In the morning Sarada searched the whole forest, but as he saw no human habitation in it, he was at a loss to find wherefrom had come the stranger who had befriended him in the night.

His parents, however, made their way to Puri and caught him. Sarada was brought back home. There was only one month more before the First Arts Examination. Though Sarada had been out of touch with his books for almost the whole year, with only one month's preparation he passed the examination creditably.

As Sarada's father did not like his son to visit Shri Ramakrishna too frequently, Sarada could not stay with the Master at the Cossipore garden-house, though he snatched at every opportunity to serve him there. After the passing away of the Master, Sarada again showed indiflerence to worldly things. Now and then he began to absent himself from the house. He actually wanted to give up the world, but the thought of the shock to his parents deterred him from his purpose.

To change the mind of Sarada by some supernatural

means, his elder brother performed a sacrificial ceremony lasting for about a month and a half and costing a good deal of money. At the end of the ceremony, however, the priests declared that the mind of Sarada would be difficult to change: he was destined to be a Sannyasin. Never daunted, this brother of Sarada tried various other means to put obstacles in the path of his renunciation. But as everything failed, he frankly prayed to the disciples of Shri Ramakrishna to persuade Sarada to take to a worldly life. When Sarada knew all these things, he got annoyed and joined the monastery at Barangore. But here, too, he would often be disturbed by his relations, to avoid whom he once actually made an unsuccessful attempt to fly away. At this Math the young disciples of the Master took Sannyasa ceremonially and changed their old names. Sarada was named Swami Trigunatitananda, or Trigunatita[1] as he was usually called.

Swami Trigunatita had always a great hankering for places of pilgrimage, but his love for Swamiji kept him confined to the Baranagore Math. At last in 1891 he started on a pilgrimage and visited Vrindaban, Mathura, Jaipur, Ajmer, and Kathiawar. At Porbandar in Kathiawar he unexpectedly met Swamiji, who during that time wanted to keep his whereabouts secret from his brother-disciples. After visiting some other places on the way, Swami Trigunatita returned to Baranagore. Some years afterwards, in 1895, Swami Trigunatita again started on pilgrimage—this time for Kailas and Manasarovar. It was the most difficult pilgrimage one could undertake. His indomitable spirit carried

[1] Swami Vivekananda once taunted him for his long name and asked him to shorten it. So Trigunatita became the usual name.

him through. It was the month of June or July. Snow had just begun to melt. The beautiful natural scenery which he saw there amply repaid the hardship which he had undergone in that difficult journey. He had a very daring and adventurous spirit. On more than one occasion his life was in danger in the course of the pilgrimages he performed. But every time he was very mysteriously saved. These experiences deepened his faith in God all the more.

After finishing the pilgrimages he stayed in Calcutta for some time at the house of a devotee and spent his time in deep studies. At this time he developed fistula which required surgical operation. The doctor came, but the Swami would not subject himself to chloroform. The operation continued for full half an hour and the incision was long and deep, but the Swami stood it calmly without the least betrayal of any sign of pain. As soon as he recovered, he again plunged himself into studies. He was buried in books or remained absorbed in doing some literary work. Occasionally he would take scriptural classes at different places. After some time the Swami went to stay in the monastery at Alambazar. There also he carried with him his habit of study. His room was packed with books with which he would be found constantly busy.

During this period he started three centres in Calcutta for the training of students. But the plan had to be given up after some time.

In 1897, when the district of Dinajpur was in the grip of a terrible famine, the Swami went there and organised relief work. On this occasion his wonderful spirit of service was in evidence. Himself living on 'Bhikshâ' (alms) or sometimes on scanty or no meals,

he laboured day and night in distributing food to the starving population.

Swami Trigunatita had a strange capacity as regards food. He could live for days together with only one piece of fruit for his daily meal. And if he liked, he could eat the quantity of food which it could take four strongly-built persons to consume. Having this capacity, he would sometimes in fun bewilder or embarrass his friends. Once, on one of his pilgrimages, he went to a hotel for his meal. But he began to eat so much that the poor hotel-keeper had to approach and request him with folded hands to stop taking further food, and said that he would not charge the Swami anything for what he had already taken. In later days the Swami greatly enjoyed narrating this incident.

For some years he had an idea of starting a magazine in Bengali for spreading the Master's message. Swamiji also had blessed the idea from the West. The idea took a practical shape, a few days after the Ramakrishna Math had been transferred from Alambazar to a rented house near the present site of Belur Math. Swamiji now offered to supply all the money needed for giving a start to this project. Accordingly a press was bought and Swami Trigunatita was put in charge of the whole thing: he was the editor of the paper, the manager of the press, and as a matter of fact, everything. To organise the publication of the periodical, which Swamiji named *Udbodhan,* Swami Trigunatita had to undergo Herculean labour. He did not care about his daily meal and he did not care about his physical comfort or illness ; *Udbodhan* became the one absorbing interest of his life. When Swamiji heard of the labour and hardship which Swami Trigunatita was

passing through, he remarked that such an amount of work and hardship was possible only for a disciple of the Master who lived only for the good of humanity.

Though Swami Trigunatita was killing himself, as it were, in the work of the *Udbodhan*, whenever he heard of anybody being ill, he was sure to be by his bedside. In fact, no work would give greater delight to the Swami than serving others. Once an employee of the Udbodhan Press was attacked by cholera. Swami Trigunatita made all arrangements for his treatment and himself attended the case constantly. The poor servant was dumbfounded at the conduct of the Swami: could he believe his eyes that a master was doing so much for a paid hand!

As a result of the vigilant care and ceaseless industry of Swami Trigunatita, the work in connection with the *Udbodhan* was being well organised. But Swamiji asked him to go to San Francisco in America to replace Swami Turiyananda who was returning to India. Swami Trigunatita was ready to obey any command of the leader, and he agreed to go to the West however much it might interfere with his Indian mode of living. But, unfortunately, Swamiji passed away unexpectedly on 4th July 1902, to the great grief of all his brother-disciples. Swami Trigunatita's departure was thus delayed. He, however, sailed for America via the Pacific, some months after this sad event, and reached San Francisco on 2nd January 1903. The matter of dress for the new country he settled by going in oriental costume. As regards the question of food, he determined to maintain a strict vegetarian diet, and not being able to get accurate information as to the vegetables and fruits grown in the United States of America, he started on his voyage

with the resolution to live, if necessary, on bread and water. He afterwards found, of course, that vegetables and cereals of all kinds were grown in abundance in that country.

When the Swami arrived in San Francisco there was a group of loyal friends and students of Vedanta to greet him, and he was taken at once to the home of Dr. M. H. Logan, the President of the San Francisco Vedanta Society. A few weeks later, he went to the home of Mr. and Mrs. C. F. Peterson, where he was to make his headquarters. Soon after, old and new students of Vedanta began to come from all directions. The news that another Swami, again a direct disciple of Shri Ramakrishna, had come to take up the work, spread far and wide, and very soon the Swami's time was filled to overflowing.

Classes were organised and a hall secured where lectures were given on Sunday afternoons. The home of the Petersons soon proved too small for the large attendance at the classes, and the decision was made to find more commodious quarters. A flat was taken in March 1903, giving larger space for the classes and lectures. Classes were regularly held on Monday and Thursday evenings for members.

In the year 1904, in response to calls, the Swami found a fertile field for work in the city of Los Angeles in Southern California, 425 miles from San Francisco. But after organising classes there, he found a difficulty in carrying on the work at that distance ; so in the same year he wrote to India for an assistant Swami to take charge of that work. The Swami who came to take up the new work was compelled to return to India for reasons of health at the end of the year.

In 1904 the work had grown to such proportions that Swami Trigunatita felt the time had come when the Vedanta Society of San Francisco should have a building of its own. With Swami Trigunatita, to think was to act, and a committee was at once appointed to look for a suitable site. Soon a meeting of all the members was called, the funds were quickly raised, and a plot of land was purchased in the name of the San Francisco Vedanta Society. Plans were immediately commenced for the building under the supervision of the Swami, and at last took form in what was to be known as the first Hindu Temple in the whole Western world. The call for subscriptions went out, and almost without exception the entire membership, with many friends of the movement, responded. Rich and poor, old and young, came with their offerings and before long, sufficient funds were subscribed to commence operations. In the month of August 1905, with appropriate ceremonies, the corner-stone was laid. Here at last, in San Francisco, the city beside the Golden Gate, a permanent centre was established, a channel through which the Truth could flow to quench the thirst of thousands of world-weary souls with its life-giving waters. With regard to the future of the Temple, the Swami said, "Believe me, believe me, if there is the least tinge of selfishness in building this Temple it will fall, but if it is the Master's work, it will stand." The Temple was dedicated to the cause of humanity on 7th January 1906, and the first services were held on Sunday, the 15th January.

Shortly after this, an idea of starting a monastery in connection with the Vedanta Society occurred to him. There were a number of young men attending

the lectures and meetings of the Society who had an inclination to live the life of Brahmacharins. About ten of them became the inmates of the monastery. This number was added to occasionally, but the new-comers were not always permanent, and the number remained at an average of ten. The young men were all engaged in various occupations and continued to earn their own living, contributing according to their abilities their share of the expenses of the monastery upkeep, until such time as they might either desire or were ready in the Swami's judgment to take the vows of Brahmacharya.

These young men were subjected to strict discipline. They had to rise early in the morning, meditate regularly and do all household duties such as cleaning, sweeping, etc. The Swami instructed them that all work connected with the Temple was holy and, if performed in the right spirit, would purify their minds and advance their meditation.

The Swami was fond of forceful maxims. When someone recited the great watchword of the American Republic, "Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty", he made him repeat it. Some of the mottoes hanging in every room of the monastery were: "Live like a hermit, but work like a horse"; "Do it now"; "Watch and pray"; and one which he constantly quoted, "Do or die, but you will not die."

The Swami thoroughly believed in singing as a spiritual exercise. In the early morning he often took the young men up on the roof of the monastery to sing devotional hymns and songs. Half a mile distant was the bay of San Francisco, and sometimes the Swami took them thither for the morning singing and meditation. At that early hour none were astir except the

fishermen in their motor boats and an occasional ship putting out to sea. Usually the air was calm and still, and, as the voices rolled out over the waters of the wide bay, it must have been a source of wonder to the listening sailors and fishermen.

The Swami's life was an example to others in every respect. But he was under the continuous scrutiny of some young men for any deviation from his own percepts. There were those who never questioned, but there were some doubters, or unwilling believers, and these were eventually satisfied. For all that they found in his character was the one consuming purpose to give his life for the salvation of others, and that all of his undertakings were only means to that end. A great disciplinarian of the highest order, his was the brightest example of what a disciplined life should be. He ever maintained his Sannyasin life and, notwithstanding his various ailments, insisted on sleeping on the floor of his office, a light mattress being the only concession he would make to the entreaties of those concerned for his health and comfort. In addition to his unceasing daily labours, the Swami cooked all the meals for the monastery, so that the young men might eat pure, Sâttvika food, so very essential for the growth of spiritual life. Always to bed later than the others, he was yet the first to rise. This he did, not for a day or a month, but from year to year. He was the model of punctuality and regularity. This discipline in punctuality was all the more remarkable when it is remembered that, in the first place, it was not natural to him, and in the second place, his mendicant life aimed at destroying the very idea of time itself. Seeing, however, the value of the virtue of punctual-

ity in the lives of spiritual aspirants, he bent his will to be punctual himself and then required it of his disciples.

As he had his mind fixed on the inner core of things, possible external bad results never deterred him. To the genuine disciple he would say, "I don't mind if I break every bone in your body, so long as I can drag you up to the shores of the Ocean of Immortality and throw you in ; then my work will be finished."

Sometimes young men came to the Swami expressing their desires to live the ascetic life under discipline. Some had read the lives of saints, and in their mind's eye was the picture of a monk's cell with its association of many forms of asceticism. To such, the Swami suggested, they should first spend a few months in the Temple monastery as a preparation for the solitary life. They were then assigned sleeping quarters, usually in the same room with others, and subjected to the limitations of privacy which such close contact brought. This was the first step in discipline as nearly all were accustomed to sleeping in a room alone. Then to their surprise, they sat down at least twice daily to wholesome and substantial meals. Nothing seemed to accord with their idea of asceticism. After two or three months, they discovered that some of the hardest discipline lies in the conquest of the ego under the constant friction of this daily association. Some would make complaints of others to the Swami. He would reply, "Did you not ask for discipline?" "Yes," they would answer, "but not that kind", and then would leave the monastery. Those who endured and made the best of everything conquered themselves and learnt the true spirit of service to others. Some of them afterwards looked back on the years of

their monastery life as among their most delightful memories.

The life of the Swami was one long sacrifice, and those who were privileged to be in his presence found their doubts and troubles melt away like snow before the sun. He veritably radiated holiness, for he ever lived in the consciousness of the Divine Mother. Every moment of contact with him was one of increasing education, conscious and unconscious.

From the year 1913, one by one, by death and other reasons, the monastery membership began to diminish until only a few remained and the monastery was finally closed with the death of Swami Trigunatita himself.

The Swami also started a nunnery as a separate community at the earnest entreaties of some women disciples who wanted to live a life of discipline under the personal spiritual instruction of the Swami. The women disciples were full of earnest zeal and lived the life most sincerely. They did all their cooking and household work in the spirit of worship and service to God and faithfully adhered to the rules laid down by the Swami as regards eating, hours of rising, and general spiritual conduct. They worked hard but were happy at the thought that they were working out their salvation for the ultimate goal of realisaion and freedom. The Swami's hope was that the nunnery might be the seed of awaking a spiritual life among the women of the U.S.A. and that great results might accrue from its apparently small beginning.

In 1909 the Swami started a monthly magazine, called *Voice of Freedom,* as a channel through which to reach many souls who either did not attend his lectures or who were too far away to come to them. The magazine ever

and always held constant to the high ideals of the truths of the Vedanta philosophy and the variety of materials published soon attracted a wide circle of readers. The magazine continued for seven years, after which period it was stopped to the disappointment of many Vedanta students.

Every year the Swami would lead a selected group of students to "Shanti Ashrama"—a peace retreat in the San Antone Valley, eighteen miles south-east of Mt. Hamilton, California, the site of the world-famous Lick Observatory. Situated at a picturesque spot, the Shanti Ashrama, as named by Swami Turiyananda, who first took up the work there at the instance of Swami Vivekananda, was an ideal spot for spiritual culture. It reminded one of the ancient Ashramas of the Indian Rishis in the Himalayas, and the very atmosphere of the place was spiritually invigorating. Practically the whole day—from 3-45 in the morning when everyone was to get up, till ten o'clock in the night when lights were out—the inmates were busy meditating, attending scriptural classes, listening to discourses, and so on. Even eating was regarded as one of the most important functions of the spiritual life, and the Swami devoted the mealtimes to chanting, instruction, and scriptural reading, himself taking his own meals apart from the class.

One day a week was set apart as a day of individual solitude and fasting, as a voluntary asceticism. All who participated retired to their cabins, where they could spend the entire twenty-four hours in meditation or other spiritual practices. To some, in that holy place, there came revelations and experiences in the twenty-four hours which silenced doubts, satisfied anxious longings, and gave new impetus to their spiritual aspira-

tions. The minds of all, however, seemed to be like an open book to the Swami, and individuals found that their inmost motives and actions had become known to him, and more than one was thus sometimes checked in rash impulses and extremes of conduct. Others, during the time of meditation, received spiritual visions and felt themselves translated into a different world. Sometimes on the nights of the full moon, the Swami held what might be called a Dhuni (fire) ceremony, when under the open sky, round a fire, the students would sit and spend the whole night in spiritual practices. That was one of the valuable exercises for every student.

In order to relieve any strain that might result from a diet of too great seriousness, the Swami declared two afternoons a week as holidays, and a stream of genuine fun and merriment followed. The Swami himself was the leader in the fun.

Those who were privileged to attend the Shanti Ashrama classes could hardly forget their unique experience there; they found the desire ever recurring in their minds to renew their visits and spiritual inspiration.

How every act of the Swami was sanctified, surcharged with spiritual motives, could be evidenced from the instructions he gave to select students who were asked to do platform work in the Hindu Temple. A discourse was to be made an occasion for the application of Vedanta philosophy in practical life. A lesson or a lecture was "to be taken sincerely as a spiritual service and religious practice for one's own spiritual advancement". In preparing themselves, the students were to "meditate that the grace of God was being conferred on

the subject, that it was being sanctified by His Divine touch". The subject was to be received through prayer, and at the time of delivery, the speaker was to remember that he was "talking to God, that God was the only audience".

The Swami would very often say, "That mind which is attached to more than one thing can never reach the goal." "Learn to see God in everything about you. Smear God over everything, and your mind will think of Him alone."

The second year after the Swami's arrival in San Francisco, his health suffered from an attack of rheumatism and other physical troubles. The different climate, the new confining life due to his intense devotion to the work, all told upon a constitution weakened by the merciless rigours of early asceticism on the path to realisation. To one to whom the body had ceased to be the means to an end and was now only kept for the purpose of service to humanity, it was irksome to take proper precautions for its protections, and various ailments secured a foothold, resulting later in serious illness. As the years drew on, the Swami's ailments increased in number, but he never allowed them to interfere with his work. For the last five years of his life, he suffered constantly, day and night, from chronic rheumatism and Bright's disease. So complicated were his physical troubles that he used to say, "This body is kept together only by the force of will ; whenever I let go, it will just fall to pieces of its own accord."

Notwithstanding this great handicap of ill health, he arose regularly at 4 a.m. daily ; and while meeting the demands of all his other duties, he never failed to conduct the regular lectures and classes. If anything, his

activities increased. So resolute and determined was his will that only a few knew the true condition of his health, but unmistakable signs began to appear showing that the body was yielding gradually to the heavy burdens imposed upon it. But alas, nobody knew that the end would come in an unexpected and tragic way!

In December 1914, three days after Christmas, which had been celebrated with wonderful solemnity in the San Francisco Hindu Temple, Swami Trigunatita was holding a Sunday Service when a live bomb was thrown to the pulpit. It was the act of a young man, a former student of the Swami, who did it in a fit of depression and an unbalanced state of mind. Immediately there was an explosion, and a cloud of dense blue smoke obscured the platform. When the smoke cleared, it was found that the young man himself had been killed, and that the Swami had received severe injuries. It was immediately arranged to remove the Swami to a hospital. On his way to the hospital the Swami said, "Where is X, poor fellow?" In the midst of excruciating pain his mind was yet filled with pity that anyone should do such a rash act.

Although medical skill did all it could, the shattered condition of the Swami's constitution, for years ready to disintegrate, was such that the system could not resist the infection from the wounds. Although every waking moment was one of intense suffering, no word of complaint ever passed his lips. From time to time he gave instructions to one disciple after another to be faithful to the cause to the end and, even to the last, his thoughts were never for himself but for the Master's work and mission.

On the afternoon of 9th January, the Swami aroused

himself out of an apparently unconscious state and in the course of the conversation with the young disciple in charge said that he would leave his body the next day, January 10, the birthday of Swami Vivekananda. Just before 7-30 p.m., on January 10, the young man was called out of the room for a few minutes, and when he returned the Swami had already left the body for that plane from which he had been attracted to earth by his Master to take up the work of the salvation of humanity.

Thus passed a great soul whose life was devoted to the spiritual unfoldment of man—a great Yogi and the servant of all. In what great esteem Swami Trigunatita was held in San Francisco could be judged from the large number of people who attended his funeral service. These were not simply his students and disciples but represented many sections of society.

Is God all-merciful? No, He is both merciful and cruel. He is softer than the flower, and yet harder than adamant. Sometimes He is the loving mother, and sometimes most terrible—the very consort of all consuming time! Infinite are His forms and infinite His qualities. He alone knows how He would guide someone or bless somebody. All that is beyond the comprehension of man, nay, of the gods even. He can be both infinitely kind and infinitely cruel—it is all according to His will. He cannot be guided according to our thoughts and wishes. We are His, and He will deal with us just as He pleases. Our devotion must not be dependent on any particular action, quality, or form of His ; our devotion must be without any motive. It is extremely bad if our devotion increases when He is kind and it takes to flight when He is cruel or does not heed our prayers. But I concede that for the beginners, devotion cannot be free from motives altogether.

Men do not understand this simple fact that it is of little consequence how one conceives of Him—as kind, cruel, or what not, but what is fraught with danger is not to call on Him at all. One must call on Him—no matter whether one does so under the idea that He is cruel or that He is gracious. I have no need of knowing what He really is, nor can there be any end of such knowing ; and what does such knowledge count for? I have come to the mango orchard to taste mangoes, what do I care about a detailed knowledge about the tree and the orchard?

God likes play, He is both kind and cruel, and again He is beyond both—He is without attributes. Everything is possible in Him, for He is infinite, and He can become everything. He has no end, no finitude, no limit.

One should cultivate goodwill for others in one's mind with great assiduity, cordiality, and sincerity. One who keeps one's mind ever filled with goodwill for others can get a thousand faults of his own burnt to ashes and he comes to be remembered as a saint. Through goodwill for others he rises from lassitude to activity, from poverty to wealth, from miserliness to generosity, from insignificance to fame, and from ignorance to wisdom, nay from muteness to oratory and from lameness to a scaler of mountains. So powerful is goodwill.

Goodwill is so pure and holy, so strong and vital that even if one cultivates it for oneself, that goodwill converts itself into the welfare of others at last indirectly and imperceptibly; and though in the first stages (in such cases) others come within its purview indirectly, with maturity it works for others even directly. To the outsiders, it seems at the beginning as though saintly people are engaged in their own welfare, hugging good wishes for themselves alone to their hearts, and engaging themselves in spiritual practices for their own good, but when they attain perfection, it becomes obvious to all that they cannot help spending the remaining portions of their lives in doing good to others alone. A good man means a man with good wishes for others.

According to some, the stage of family life is considered to be the highest of the four stages of life. It is a most sacred stage; it is not meant for people leading a beastly life, but for those who have purified themselves by

passing through an earlier stage of continence and purity of heart. Just think of the care one must take in living properly in that stage of a householder's life, to whom holy man or monk, nay even Narayana Himself pays visits.

It is not in India alone that continence has been given such a dominant and absolutely necessary position in the domain of religion ; all countries and all religions sing its praise in the same way. They all speak of the same kind of continence here and elsewhere.

A holy man is full of compassion. About Shri Ramakrishna I heard that as he was one day walking over a lawn, he once turned back to find that the grass over which he had trodden were trying to raise their heads again with difficulty. This made him weep, and he said, "Alas, these too are sentient, these too are suffering greatly!" From that day on, he could not walk on lawns.

Shri Ramakrishna would say, "He who can give up his wife, can also renounce the world", that is to say, if one has succeeded in discarding his hankerings for sense-enjoyment, one has no other object left that has to be given up afresh.

How many times and in what infinite ways have we been born and reborn! But in no life did we take shelter under God. It does not take such a long time to surrender oneself to God. It does not take even a single life to dedicate oneself to His lotus-feet, nay it does not take even a moment! The only thing needed is the will to do so. So easy it is, and yet we fail!

The most effective means of getting control over the senses is to look upon all women as one's mothers. You are apt to look on them otherwise from your very child-

hood, and you never call on women as mothers with all sincerity, that is why the problem of sense-control becomes so difficult. Just as on seeing an image of any goddess, we have a natural inclination to salute her, to worship her, and to pray to her, so also may our devotion be aroused on seeing any woman, and may we feel a natural inclination from within to bow down to her!

Keep on praying to God with your whole heart; if the need arises for you to have a Guru, God will send somebody for you who will be just the man you want. If you do not believe in a Mantra, that too is not imperative. A Mantra is needed for bringing the mind under one's control. One who succeeds in controlling the mind, has not much need of a Mantra. But one thing you must know: Generally speaking, it helps greatly to use some Mantra in the beginning. But if you cannot believe in it, why, you can just choose any one of the names of God and go on repeating the same. He is for all, and comes to anyone who calls on Him.

People talk of finding out the proper kind of Guru. But that is not a reasonable position in all cases. Whoever the Guru may be, everything will progress nicely if the disciple is earnest and sincere.

People of all castes can be initiated by a good Guru who has attained perfection. What caste can a true devotee or the perfect souls have? When the individual souls merge in God (like rivers in the sea), they can no more have any individuality. So how can there be then the distinctions of caste? Such distinctions as Brahmin, Shudra, etc. belong to the body, and never to the soul.

A man becomes perfect in proportion as he rises above the ideas of body etc. But nobody can recognize a perfect man unless he is himself one.

SWAMI AKHANDANANDA

Swami Akhandananda, or Gangadhar Ghatak, as he was called in his pre-monastic life, was born on 30th September 1864, in Calcutta. Even from his boyhood he was of a deeply religious turn of mind, and had extremely orthodox habits. He bathed several times a day, cooked his one daily meal himself, read the Gita and other scriptures, and regularly practised meditation. This was his mode of life when he came in contact with Shri Ramakrishna probably in 1883 or 1884 at Dakshineswar, which he visited with his friend Harinath (Swami Turiyananda). The Master, as was customary with him, received him cordially, and asked him if he had seen him before. The boy answered that he had, when he had been very young, at the house of Dinanath Bose, a devotee who lived at Baghbazar. The Master made him stay overnight, and when he was taking leave the next morning, Shri Ramakrishna asked the boy, in his characteristic way, to come again. Then began that close association between the Master and the disciple which afterwards ripened into a strong urge for renunciation of the world on the part of Gangadhar, and his dedication to the service of God in man. Every time he visited Dakshineswar he was charmed to see some new phase of Shri Ramakrishna's God-intoxicated life. He felt the silent transforming influence of his love and received practical instructions from him on spirituality. Under this tutelage, Gangadhar gradually dropped his over-orthodox observances, which the Master described as "oldish", saying, "Look at Naren (Swami Viveka-

nanda). He has such prominent eyes! He chews a hundred betel rolls a day, and eats whatever he gets. But his mind is deeply introspective. He goes along the streets of Calcutta seeing houses and chattels, horses and carriages, and everything as full of God! Go and see him one day. He lives at Simla (a district of Calcutta)." The next day Gangadhar saw Narendra Nath and at once understood the truth of the Master's remarks, to whom he reported his impressions, and the Master wondered how the boy could learn so much in a single interview. Gangadhar said, "On reaching there, I noticed those prominent eyes of his and found him reading a voluminous English work. The room was full of dirt, but he scarcely noticed anything. His mind seemed to be away beyond this world." The Master advised him to visit Narendra Nath often. This was the foundation of his abiding devotion and allegiance to Swamiji, the hero of his life.

Gangadhar went often to Dakshineswar and subsequently to Cossipore to meet and serve the Master till the latter finally entered into Mahasamadhi in August 1886. When the Monastery at Baranagore was started, he kept close contact with his brother-disciples there and particularly with Narendra Nath, whom he loved heartily. But though he did not join the monastery immediately, he was fired with the ideal of leading the unfettered life of a wandering monk and started in February 1887, on a long pilgrimage to the Himalayas and Tibet. He crossed over to Tibet thrice and finally returned to India in 1890.

After his return, he was full of the grandeur of the Himalayas and Tibet, had frequent correspondence with Swami Vivekananda, then at Ghazipur, who

induced him to join him in travelling in some places of the Himalayas. Accordingly, Swami Akhandananda came to Baranagore monastery, and after spending a few happy months with his brother-disciples, sharing his experiences with them, he set out in July 1890, with Swami Vivekananda on a pilgrimage to the Himalayas. Visiting important places on the way they reached Almora, whence they proceeded to Karnaprayag on the route to Badrinath. But illness of the one or the other prevented their proceeding farther, and they returned after some weeks, via Tehri, to Dehra Dun, whence Swami Akhandananda went to Meerut for treatment. Soon after this, he was again joined by Swami Vivekananda, who had been taken seriously ill while practising austerities at Rishikesh, the great resort of monks at the foot of the Himalayas. He brought with him some of the other brother-disciples, including Swami Brahmananda. When, after five delightful months of association of the brothers, Swami Vivekananda, impelled by an inner hankering to remain alone, left them to make a tour of the country as a wandering monk, Swami Akhandananda, unable to bear his separation, followed his footsteps from province to province, determined to find him. But at every place he visited, he got the disconcerting news that Swamiji had left it a few days ago. He persisted in his search with unflagging resolve, till at last he discovered the object of his search at a port called Kutch Mandvi in distant Kutch. He, however, yielded to the leader's earnest desire to be left alone, and each continued his pilgrimage separately.

Shortly after Swami Vivekananda's departure for America in May, 1893, Swami Akhandananda learnt from Swamis Brahmananda and Turiyananda, at Mt.

Abu that the real motive of the leader's journey to the West was to find bread for the hungry masses of India. For the sight of their crushing poverty and misery was too much for him, and he considered it absurd to preach religion to them without first improving their material condition. This communication made little impression upon Swami Akhandananda at the time. Then he fell ill and went for a change to Khetri, where, after six months' rest and treatment, under the care of Maharaja Ajit Singh, a staunch disciple of Swami Vivekananda, he regained his health. But those months gave him ample opportunity to come in close touch with all sections of people, high and low, rich and poor, and it was then that he realised the truth of Swami Vivekananda's words. Now himself also burning with the desire to serve the poor and helpless masses, he wrote to Swamiji in America asking for his permission. The encouraging reply he received pushed him on, and in 1894, he began his campaign against poverty and ignorance. It did not take him long to realise that the appalling poverty of the masses could not be removed without proper education. Hence education became his first objective. He talked with the Maharaja and his courtiers, impressing upon all the need of educating their children, and succeeded by strenuous efforts in raising the strength of the local High School from 80 to 257, as well as in improving the teaching staff. He next visited the villages around Khetri and started five primary schools for the village boys. The Maharaja of Khetri was induced by him to make an annual grant of Rs. 5,000 for the spread of education in his territory. At the instance of the Swami, the Sanskrit School at Khetri was converted into a Vedic School, and as the

students were too poor to purchase books, the Swami raised subscriptions, purchased books and had them distributed free to the boys by the Political Agent. He also induced the Maharaja to lift the ban against the admittance of his poorer subjects from seeing him on durbar days.

Next year the Swami happened to visit Udaipur, where he was much pained to see the condition of the Bhils, the aboriginal inhabitants of the place. With the help of a friend he had them sumptuously fed one day. He also took great pains to start a Middle English School at Nathadwara, and founded at Alwar and other places of Rajputana a number of societies which regularly discussed useful social, religious, and educational topics. Finally he left Rajputana and returned early in 1895 to the monastery, which was then at Alambazar.

Here also he was not idle. Whenever a cholera case was reported in the neighbourhood, he would run to the spot and try his utmost to nurse the patient to recovery without any regard for personal safety. In the beginning of 1897, he started northwards on foot along the Ganga till he came to a village some twenty miles from Berhampore, in the district of Murshidabad, where he met a poor Mohammedan girl weeping: she had broken her pitcher, the only one in the family, and there was no means to replace it. The Swami had only four annas with him. He bought a pitcher from a shop for the girl and gave her half an anna worth of popped rice to eat. While he was resting there, a dozen emaciated old women in rage surrounded him for food. He immediately spent his little balance in purchasing some food for them. Shortly after this he came to learn that

a famished old woman was lying sick and helpless in that village. He at once went there and did what he could to help her.

This was his first contact with famine. The farther he proceeded, the more frightful spectacles he met, till at Mahula he cried halt. He resolved not to move from the place until he had relieved the famine-stricken people, and so wrote to the Alambazar Math asking for help. Swami Vivekananda, who had returned to India about three months before, despatched two of the monks with some money to the scene. And so on 15th May 1897, the first famine relief work of the Ramakrishna Mission was inaugurated with Mahula and Panchgaon as centres, and it lasted for about a year. In the course of it Swami Akhandananda had to take charge of two orphans, and the idea of founding an orphanage first entered his mind. With encouragement from the district officers the Swami, after taking temporary care of a number of orphans, founded in May 1898, at Mahula, the orphanage entitled the Ramakrishna Ashrama, which was removed shortly after to a rented house at Sargachhi. After continuing there for thirteen years the Ashrama was moved to its own premises in the same village, which it has been occupying since March 1913.

The Swami, from the foundation of this institution to the last day of his life, bestowed his best attention on its improvement, and it saved a good number of orphan boys from starvation, illiteracy, and degradation. Many of these were put in a position to earn an honest living. Under the Swami's supervision, the Ashrama also conducted during these years a day and a night school for the village boys and adults and an outdoor dispensary, which afterwards developed considerably

and treated thousands of sick people every year. From 1900 to 1910 the Ashrama ran a vocational school, teaching weaving, sewing, carpentry, and sericulture. The handicrafts turned out by its boys won first prizes for several successive years at the Banjetia Industrial Exhibition organised by Maharaja Manindra Chandra Nandi of Cossimbazar, who, by the way, was a staunch patron of the institution. Unfortunately, for want of accommodation, the school had to be discontinued.

The Swami not only attended to the general education of the Ashrama boys, but also paid due regard to their spiritual training, the chanting of prayers morning and evening being compulsory for them. Select passages from the sacred books like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata were read and explained to them. Orphans were admitted into the Ashrama without any distinction of caste or creed. Thus a few Mohammedan boys were also maintained at the Ashrama for several years, and trained so that they might develop faith in their own religion.

The training given at the Ashrama had enough scope for the culture of the heart as well. Through example as well as precept Swami Akandananda encouraged his boys to do noble acts of service whenever there was any outbreak of pestilence or any other calamity in the neighbouring villages. Thus hundreds of cholera patients were nursed by them and saved from untimely death, while prophylactic measures were adopted in many villages with satisfactory results.

Even after the opening of the orphanage, Swami Akhandananda could not help taking succour to the distressed in distant places. During the heavy flood at Ghogha, in the Bhagalpur district of Bihar, he forthwith

started a relief work in which fifty villages were helped for ten weeks, and himself nursed a large number of cholera patients on the occasion. Again, during the terrible earthquake in Bihar in 1934, he, old as he was, personally inspected the scenes of the ravage at Monghyr and Bhagalpur and gave impetus to the Mission's relief work in those areas. His whole life was full of such disinterested acts. To him all human beings in distress were veritable divinities, and he found intense joy in serving them. In this he literally carried out Swami Vivekananda's behest: "The poor, the illiterate, the ignorant, the afflicted—let these be your God. Know that the service of these alone is the highest religion."

He loved to work silently and unobserved among the dumb masses, and this is why, in spite of his indifferent health, he stuck to the village work at Sargachhi. He was made the Vice President of the Ramakrishna Mission in 1925, and President in March, 1934, on the passing away of Swami Shivananda. The duties of the latter post required his presence at the Belur Math, but he preferred the solitude of Sargachhi, and was quite happy with his orphan boys, supervising the agricultural work and taking care of the valuable collection of trees and plants in the orchard. Routine work was distasteful to him. Throughout his life, however, he was a lover of books and gathered a great store of knowledge on diverse subjects. He had a prodigious memory, which, coupled with his strong power of observation and dramatic sense, made him a first-rate conversationalist. His adventurous life as a penniless itinerant monk throughout Northern and Western India, particularly his experiences in Tibet, furnished him with inexhaustible materials for conversation, and he would keep his audience spell-

bound with narrations of the privations and dangers he had gone through, and the rare experiences he had gained in exchange for them. He was an authority on Tibet, having visited that little known country long before the late Rai Bahadur Sharat Chandra Das, and he had had great opportunities of studying the people at close quarters on account of his knowledge of the language. He had a special aptitude for learning languages. While in Rajputana he mastered the intricacies of Hindi grammar. He knew Sanskrit as well as English, and his particular interest was in the Vedas. Not only could he recite and explain choice passages from the Samhitas, but he was at one time keen about founding institutions in Bengal for the study and propagation of Vedic culture, for which purpose he visited and tried to enlist the co-operation of scholars and persons of distinction. He was a forceful writer in his mother tongue and occasionally contributed serial article to magazines, such as the unfinished "Three Years in Tibet", in the *Udbodhan,* the Bengali organ of the Ramakrishna Order, and his Reminiscences in the monthly *Vasumati,* left, alas, incomplete by his sudden passing away. He was an extempore speaker, too, though he was extremely reluctant to appear before the public in that rôle. His impromptu speech at the memorial meeting in honour of the late Nafar Chandra Kundu, who gave his life to save two sweeper boys from a manhole in Calcutta, was much appreciated.

Above all, like many a great saint, he loved fun. In fact, the boyish element was uppermost in him, so much so that even in the midst of a serious conversation he could make his audience laugh with some droll anecdote. His brother-disciples, knowing this lighter side of his

nature, would tickle him by creating humorous situations, which he, too, relished. One such incident has been narrated in the chapter on the life of Swami Brahmananda, who was a past master in this game.

The love which the children of Shri Ramakrishna bore towards one another is indescribable. Swami Akhandananda was the favourite of all. Swami Vivekananda loved him particularly, and affectionately addressed him "Ganges" (the English equivalent for "Ganga"); but he did not on that account spare the young Swami when it came to indulging in practical jokes. The Master himself was a great lover of fun and used it as an effective means of imparting spirituality and all his disciples shared this attitude towards life. Even if the joke was at one another's expense, it endeared them all the more to one another.

After his assumption of the Presidential office, Swami Akhandananda was called upon to initiate disciples. Though he showed reluctance at first, perhaps out of humility, he soon overcame the scruple, and during the last three years blessed a good many earnest seekers of both sexes. He insisted on their observing a high standard of purity and moral excellence in their everyday life.

About a year before his death he had a premonition of the approaching end, and told some of his disciples about it. With this in view, he arranged the recital of the Râmâyana and the Mahâbhârata in his presence. Near the end he expressed his desire to celebrate the Vâsanti Pujâ, the vernal worship of the Divine Mother Durgâ, at the Ashrama. But knowing that two of his predecessors had had that desire and passed away without seeing the ceremony performed, he had misgivings about

his own case too, and expressed himself to that effect. He had a shed erected for this purpose and said to the Ashrama workers, "If I do not live to see the worship, at least I have the satisfaction of raising this Mandapa for the Mother. You will do the rest." Like the independent man that he was, he often pooh-poohed the idea of suffering long on his death-bed. Chafing under the infirmities of old age and at having to accept through sheer necessity the loving services of his attendants, he would occasionally declare that he sometimes had a mind to break away from these ties and wander alone, away from the haunts of men. He loved Sargachhi dearly and never liked to be away from it for long if he could help. But it was a cherished desire of his to give up the body, not there but at the Belur Math, the place that was sanctified with a thousand and one memories of his beloved brother-disciples from the great Swami Vivekananda downwards. This wish of his was providentially fulfilled, since he was taken to Calcutta for better medical treatment, a couple of days before his passing away.

A month earlier, Swami Akhandananda had written to the Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, asking for the wording of a Sanskrit couplet that had appeared in the April number of the *Prabuddha Bharata* in 1927, in an article entitled "Neo-Hinduism". It ran as follows:

न त्वहं कामये राज्यं न स्वर्गं नाऽपुनर्भवम् ।
कामये दुःखतप्तानां प्राणिनामार्तिनाशनम् ॥

"I do not covet earthly kingdom, or heaven, or even salvation. The only thing I desire is the removal of the

miseries of the afflicted." The idea expressed in the couplet was so much after the Swami's heart that even after the lapse of ten years, on the eve of his departure from this world, he wanted to know its precise reading. Swami Akhandananda entered Mahasamadhi at the age of 71, at the Belur Math on 7th February 1937.

The *Isha Upanishad* declares that those who do not try to know the Self are killers of the Self. A life is well spent if it is dedicated to the quest of the Self. What is that Self? One has to hear about the Self first, then think of It, and then meditate on It. Yajnavalkya told Maitreyi that the Self is the dearest of all, and all else is dear for the sake of the Self. It is the Self alone that exists and nothing else besides. Everything springs out of the Self and everything is in the Self. The Self resides in all, though It may be asleep in some. There It has to be roused. The attempt is always going on in everybody to express that Self, and that is what constitutes spiritual practice. In fact, whatever you do is a sort of spiritual practice, be it conscious or unconscious. When that Self will be realised, one will find It present everywhere; and that is one's highest achievement. One's purpose of life is to attain that state. Everyone must actualise that experience in life, for that is one's real nature. Never think, "I can't have it, I am weak." Whenever any dejection sets in, remember that saying of the Lord in the *Gita*, "Yield not to unmanliness!"

There is no other path but to call on Him, as though one's very life is in imminent danger. Always pray, "Lord, please reveal yourself; please show yourself to me. I want nothing else, not even heavenly joys. I want you only." And along with this, one has to pray, "Lord, remove from me all hankering for enjoyment." Spiritual progress is a far cry in the midst of selfishness and narrow-mindedness.

The spiritual path for the present age lies through the harmony of all the paths of the earlier ages—harmony of knowledge, devotion, and selfless work. We must have all these: we must have knowledge, devotion, and service. It won't do to have only one.

The more you take care of yourself alone, the smaller you grow, and the more you think of others as yourself, the bigger you become. Swamiji used to say "The happiness one derives by thinking of oneself, becomes doubly multiplied when one thinks of somebody else sharing equally in one's own happiness or unhappiness." The more you practise like that way the more your Self spreads over the world, and then only can Self-knowledge dawn. The more you can think of others as yourself, the more loving your heart becomes, and the more is Self-knowledge revealed.

Spread your Self over all, and draw in theirs into yours; and then you will realise how intensely blissful that state is; and that will bring you Self-realisation. But the more you tie yourself up with selfish ideas, the narrower you become.

Japa is possible at all times; the Lord's name can be mentally repeated ever and anon. You can undertake Japa any time you like. The Master used to say that the bird sings the Lord's name as it flies.

Be quite sincere and straightforward, and never be crooked. Your heart will expand along with your sincerity and straightforwardness. Be always open and above board in all your dealings, never play at hide and seek. Straightforwardness is a great virtue. A man's heart is pure in proportion as he is open in his behaviour. Try always to have a pure mind and holy thoughts, and also physical cleanliness.

Without heart, everything else counts for nought. Unless the heart expands, nothing else will avail. Merely to continue sitting with the eyes shut will produce no fruit, it will not bring about God-realisation. One's heart must feel for others ; one must identify oneself with the happiness and sorrows of others; then only will God be realised.

The Lord has to be served with one's body, mind, and possessions. Merely to sit quiet and make Japa will not do. Do serve Him a little with your body as well. And what can mere sitting quiet will do ? For I find you getting irritated at the slightest provocation ; your mind is full of anger. Can that be the result of long meditation in the shrine ? The Master used to say that attainment of perfection means becoming gentle. Maintain your equanimity under all circumstances.

In this age of Kali, one thing that counts is the Lord's name. Go on repeating His name. Whatever work you may be doing, you must have this conviction within: "I am nobody, He is everything." Make no effort beyond your own capacity. Just repeat His name for a hundred and eight times ; that will bear fruit in time. Try to increase that number slowly. One must have a firm grasp over the mind.

The Lord's name will bring the highest spiritual perfection. The things that really count are faith and devotion. You ask me, how the Lord is to be worshipped? It is through devotion. Offer flowers to Him. Mantras and formalities I do not know ; those who perform such formal worship, know all that.

Most of us should now turn to work. They can't meditate by sitting quietly ; when they try, they start dozing. They are steeped in lethargy ; how can they

have spirituality? Do your duty, and in the midst of duty keep alive the idea that you are doing His work. Let activism come first, then will follow peacefulness; and lastly will come enlightenment. Hardly before a few days pass after initiation, they come and complain that they are not having any spiritual vision. Well, my sons, will things come to you automatically without any effort?

Can visions come for the mere asking? Where is the necessary faith and sincerity? The whole mind is packed with anger and passion. Weep and pray! How piteously they cry for their children and wives! But how few cry for the Lord?

God is the nearest to us, for He is in the heart. Men are covered with ignorance, and hence they cannot see Him. They think that He is far away. But He is the nearest to us—the Life of our life, the Mind of our mind. We breathe just because He is there.

One should not blame anyone without knowing facts fully. One should rather find fault with oneself first.

Know it for certain that pride goes before a fall. This I know from my personal experience.

The very appearance and movement of those who earnestly call on God become something uncommon and impressive. Their very presence brings happiness. Their faces are always happy, their hearts are pure, and their minds are free from likes and dislikes. They are ever eager to remain merged in the Bliss that is God. To them worldly good and evil lose their distinction—both are equal to them.

Suppose, for instance, that when you come down from the shrine. I do not speak to you affably a single word that you like, and so you become angry. Now if

this be so, what good is it that you sat in the shrine for such a long time? Swamiji used to say, "During group singing, somebody's emotion may be aroused and he may fall down in a trance; but when that is over, his mind turns to enjoyment. What kind of trance is that?" Swamiji was very much against such emotionalism.

Now pay full attention to what I say. Should one squander thoughtlessly the money that people give us? One has to be very careful in spending it. This money is to them dearer than their hearts' blood, and they earn it with the sweat of their brow. They hand this over to us for good work; and so it has to be spent carefully.

No work should be considered degrading. All works are His. Swamiji himself scoured vessels. When you sweep the floor or dress vegetables, think that you are doing His work.

The Master went through hard spiritual practice for twelve long years without sleep. What sufferings he had to face! And why? All for the good of the world. Even after these practices he had no respite; he spent his life for the good of the world. Even when he had throat cancer, and the doctor prohibited talking, he allowed himself no rest. It is for work that he left us behind. He it is who made us roam about pennilessly, and he it is, again, who placed me here to do his work.

SWAMI SUBODHANANDA

The early name of Swami Subodhananda was Subodh Chandra Ghosh. He was born in Calcutta on 8th November 1867 and belonged to the family of Shankar Ghosh, who owned the famous Kali temple at Kālitalā (Thanthania), Calcutta. His father was a very pious man and fond of religious books ; his mother also was of a very religious disposition. The influence of his parents contributed not a little to the growth of his religious life. His mother would tell him stories from the *Râmâyana,* the *Mahâbhârata,* and other scriptures. and implanted in him, while still very young, love for truth and devotion to God. From his very boyhood he showed a remarkable spirit of renunciation and had a vague feeling that he was not meant for a householder's life. When pressed to marry, he emphatically said that he would take to the life of a wanderinng monk, and so marriage would only be an obstacle in his path. As it was settled that, on his passing the class examination, he was to be married, Subodh fervently prayed to God that the result of his examination might be bad. God heard the prayer of the little boy, and Subodh, to his great relief, failed in the examination and did not get promotion. Subodh was at first a student of the Hare School and was then admitted into the school founded by Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar.

At this time he got from his father a copy of the Bengali book, *The Teachings of Shri Ramakrishna* by Suresh Chandra Datta. He was so much impressed with its contents that he became very eager to see Shri Ramakrishna. His father told him to wait till some holiday

when he could conveniently take him to Dakshineswar. But Sudodh was impatient of any delay. So one day in the middle of 1884, he stole away from the house and along with a friend started on foot for Dakshineswar. There he was received very affectionately by the Master, who caught hold of his hand and made him sit on his bed. Subodh felt reluctant to sit on the bed of a holy person, but the Master disarmed all his fears by treating him as if he were his close relation. In the course of conversation he told Subodh that he knew his parents and had visited their house occasionally and that he had also known that Subodh would be coming to him. He grasped the hand of Subodh and remaining in meditation for a few minutes said, "You will realise the goal. Mother says so." He also told Subodh that the Mother sent to him those who would receive Her grace, and asked the boy to visit him on Tuesdays and Saturdays. This was difficult of accomplishment for Subodh, as great objection would come from his parents if they knew of his intention.

The next Saturday, however, Subodh fled away from the school with his friend and went to Dakshineswar. During this visit Shri Ramakrishna in an ecstatic mood stroked his body from the navel to the throat and wrote something on his tongue, repeating, "Awake, Mother, awake!" Then he asked Subodh to meditate. As soon as he began meditation his whole body trembled and he felt something rushing along the spinal column to his brain. He was plunged into a joy ineffable and saw a strange light in which the forms of innumerable gods and goddesses appeared and then got merged in the Infinite. The meditation gradually deepened, and he lost all outward consciousness. When he came down to

the normal plane, he found the Master stroking his body in the reverse order. Shri Ramakrishna was delighted to see the deep meditation of Subodh, and learnt from him that it was the result of his practice at home; for Subodh used to think of the gods and goddesses of whom he heard from his mother.

After that meeting with the Master, Subodh would see a strange light between his eyebrows. His mother, coming to know of this, told him not to divulge this fact to anybody else. But seized as he was with a great spiritual hankering, Subodh promptly replied, "What harm will it do to me, mother? I do not want this light but That from which it comes."

From his very boyhood Subodh was very frank, open-minded, and straightforward in his talk. These characteristics could be seen in him throughout his whole life. What he felt, he would say clearly without mincing matters. One day the Master asked Subodh, "What do you think of me?" The boy unhesitatingly replied, "Many persons say many things about you. I won't believe in them unless I myself find clear proofs." As he began to come closer and closer in touch with Shri Ramakrishna, the conviction gradually dawned on him that the Master was a great Saviour. So when one day the Master asked Subodh to practise meditation, he replied, "I won't be able to do that. If I am to do it why did I come to you? I had better go to some other Guru." Shri Ramakrishna understood the depth of the feeling of the boy and simply smiled. But this did not mean that Subodh did not like to meditate—his whole life was one of great austerity, prayer, and steadfast devotion—it only indicated his great confidence in the spiritual powers of the Master.

Subodh's straighforward way of talking led to a very interesting incident. One day the Master asked Subodh to go now and then to Mahendra Nath Gupta—afterwards known as 'M'—who lived near Subodh's home in Calcutta. At this the boy said, "He has not been able to cut asunder his family tie, what shall I learn of God from him?" The Master enjoyed these words indicative of Subodh's great spirit of renunciation and said, "He will not talk anything of his own. He will talk only of what he learns from here." So one day Subodh went to 'M' and frankly narrated the conversation he had had with the Master. 'M' appreciated the frankness of the boy and said, "I am an insignificant person. But I live by the side of an ocean, and I keep with me a few pitchers of sea water. When a visitor comes, I entertain him with that. What else can I speak?" The sweet and candid nature of Subodh soon made him a great favourite with 'M'. After this Subodh was a frequent visitor at his house, where he would often spend long hours listening to 'M' 's talks on the Master.

Gradually the attraction of young Subodh for the Master grew stronger and stronger, and some time after the passing away of the Master, he left his parental homestead and joined the monastic order organised by Swami Vivekananda at Baranagore. His monastic name was Swami Subodhananda. But because he was young in age and simple in nature, Swami Vivekananda would lovingly call him "Khoka", meaning child, by which name he was also called by his brother-discipes. He was afterwards known as "Khoka Maharaj" (Child Swami).

Towards the end of 1889, along with Swami Brahmananda, Swami Subodhananda went to Varanasi and practised Tapasya for a few months. In 1890 they both

went on a pilgrimage to Omkar, Girnar, Mount Abu, Bombay, and Dwaraka and after that went to Vrindaban, where they stayed for some time. He also underwent spiritual practices in different places in the Himalayan region, later went to the holy shrines of Kedarnath and Badrinarayan twice and also visited the various holy places in South India, going as far as Cape Comorin. He also went afterwards on a pilgrimage to Assam.

When Swamiji, after his return from the West, appealed to his brother-disciples to work for the spread of the Master's message and the good of humanity instead of living in seclusion, Subodhananda was one of those who placed themselves under his lead. After that he worked in various capacities for the cause of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. During the great epidemic of plague in Calcutta in 1899, when the Ramakrishna Mission plague service was instituted, Swami Subodhananda was one of those who worked hard for the relief of the helpless and panic-striken people.

During the great famine on the Chilka islands in Orissa in 1908, he threw himself heart and soul into the relief work. He had a very tender heart. The sight of distress and suffering always found an echo in him. He would often be found near sick-beds nursing the sick at considerable risk to his own health. On one occasion he nursed a young student suffering from smallpox of a very malignant type with such loving care and attention that it amazed all who witnessed it. Sometimes he would beg money from others in order to help poor patients with diet and medicine. Many poor families did he help with money given by devotees for his personal needs. One family near the Belur Math was saved from actual starvation by the kindness of the Swami. If he

knew that a devotee was ill, he was sure to go to see him. The devotee would be surprised and overwhelmed with emotion at this unexpected stroke of kindness on the part of the Swami. A young member of the Alambazar Math had to go back temporarily to his parents because of illness. Swami Subodhananda would now and then call on him and inquire about his health. That young member rejoined the monastery after his recovery, and he remembered for ever with respectful gratitude the kindness he received in his young age from Swami Subodhananda.

Later, although Swami Subodhananda could not personally work so much, wherever he would be, he would inspire people to throw themselves into the work started by Swamiji. During his last few years, he made extensive tours in Bengal and Bihar and was very instrumental in spreading the message of the Master. He would even go to the outlying parts of Bengal, scorning all physical discomfort and inconvenience.

In religious giving also, he spent himself without any reserve. During his tours, he had to undergo great inconvenience and to work very hard. From morning till late at night, with little time left for personal rest, he had to meet people and talk of religious things—about the message of the Master and Swami Vivekananda. But never was his face ruffled and nobody could guess that here was one who was passing through great hardship. The joy of giving was always on his face. The number of persons who got spiritual initiation from him was very large. He even initiated some children. He would say, "They will feel the efficacy when they grow up." But in this act of spiritual ministration there was not the least trace of pride or self-consciousness in him. If

people would approach him for initiation, he would very often say, "What do I know? I am a Khoka." He would refer them to the more senior Swamis of the Order. Only when they could not afford to go to them, did he grant their prayer. In accepting the supplicants as disciples, he made no distinction between the high and the low. He initiated many untouchables also. His affection for them was not a whit less than that for those disciples who held good position in society or were more fortunately placed in life.

Swami Subodhananda was one of the first group of trustees of the Belur Math appointed by Swamiji in 1901, and was afterwards elected Treasurer of the Ramakrishna Mission. His love for Swamiji was next to that for the Master. Swamiji also had great affection for him. Sometimes when Swamiji would become serious and none of his Gurubhais dared approach him, it was left to "Khoka" to go and break his seriousness.

Swami Subodhananda was childlike in his simplicity and singularly unassuming in his behaviour. It is said in the Bible, "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." But rare are the persons who can combine in their lives the unsophisticated simplicity of a child with the high wisdom of a sage. One could see this wonderful combination in Swami Subodhananda. Swami Vivekananda and other brother-disciples greatly loved the childlike aspect of the personality of Swami Subodhananda. But they would not therefore fail to make fun now and then at his cost, taking advantage of his innocence and unsophisticated mind. Once, while the monastery was at Alambazar, Swami Vivekananda wanted to encourage the art of public speaking among

the monks. It was arranged that every week on a fixed day one of them should speak. When the turn of Swami Subodhananda came, he tried his best to avoid the meeting. But Swamiji was adamant, and others were waiting with eagerness to witness the discomfiture of Subodh while lecturing. Just as Swami Subodhananda rose to speak, lo! the earth trembled, buildings shook, and trees fell—it was the earthquake of 1897. The meeting came to an abrupt end. The young Swami escaped the ordeal of lecturing but not the fun at his cost. "Khoka's was a 'world-shaking' speech", Swamiji said, and others joined in the joke.

Swami Vivekananda was once greatly pleased with "Khoka" for some personal services rendered by him and said that whatever boon he would ask of him would be granted. Swami Subodhananda said, "Grant me this—that I may never miss my morning cup of tea." This threw the great Swami into a roar of laughter, and he said, "Yes, it is granted." Swami Subodhananda had his morning cup of tea till the last day of his life. It is the only luxury for which he had any attraction. It was like a child's love for chocolates and lozenges. It is interesting to record in this connection that when the Master was suffering from his sore throat and everybody was worried and anxious, young Subodh in all his innocence recommended tea to the Master as a sure remedy. The Master would also have taken it but medical advice was to the contrary.

Khoka Maharaj was easy of access, and everybody would feel very free with him. Many, on coming in contact with him, would feel his love so much that they would altogether forget the wide gulf of difference that marked their spiritual life and his. Yet he made no

conscious attempt to hide the spiritual height to which he belonged. This great unostentatiousness was part and parcel of his very being. It was remarkably strange that he could mix so freely with one and all—with people of all ages and denominations—and make them his own. Many are the persons who, though not religiously minded, were drawn to him simply by his love and were afterwards spiritually benefited.

The young Brahmacharins and monks of the Order found in him a great sympathiser. He took trouble to find out their difficulties and help them with advice and guidance. He would be their mouthpiece before the elders, mediate for them and shield them when they inadvertently did something wrong. One day a Brahmacharin committed a great mistake, and was asked to live outside the monastery and to get his food by begging. The Brahmacharin failed to get anything by begging except a quantity of fried gram and returned to the gate of the monastery in the evening. But he did not dare to enter the compound. Khoka Maharaj came to know of his plight, interceded on his behalf, and the young member was excused. The novices at the monastery had different kinds of work allotted to them. Often they did not know how to do it. Khoka Maharaj on such occasions would come forward to help and guide them.

He was self-reliant and would not accept personal services from others, even if they were devotees or disciples. He always emphasised that one should help oneself as far as possible, and himself rigidly adhered to this principle in his everyday life. Even during times of illness he was reluctant to accept any service from others, and avoided it until it became absolutely impossible for him to manage without.

His wants were few, and he was satisfied with anything that came unsought for. His personal belongings were almost nil. He would not accept anything except what was absolutely necessary for him. In food as in other things he made no choice and ate whatever came with equal relish. This great spirit of renunciation, always evidenced in his conduct, was the result of complete dependence on God. In personal conduct as well as in conversation he put much emphasis on self-surrender to God. He very often narrated to those who came to him for guidance the following story of Shridhar Swami, the great Vaishnava saint and a commentator on the Gita.

Spurred by a spirit of renunciation, Shridhar Swami was thinking of giving up the world when his wife died giving birth to a child. Shridhar felt worried about the baby and was seriously thinking how to provide for the child before retiring from the world. One day as he was sitting deeply absorbed with these thoughts, the egg of a lizard dropped from the roof in front of him. The egg broke as a result of the fall, and a young lizard came out. Just then a small fly came and stood near the young lizard, which caught and swallowed it in a moment. At this the thought flashed in the mind of Shridhar that there is a Divine plan behind creation, and that every creature is provided for beforehand by God. At once all his anxiety for his own child vanished, and he immediately renounced the world.

His spiritual life was marked by as great a directness as his external life was remarkable for its simplicity. He had no philosophical problems of his own to solve. The Ultimate Reality was a fact to him. When he would talk of God, one felt that here was a man to whom God was a greater reality than earthly relatives. He once

said, "God can be realised much more tangibly than a man feels the presence of the companion with whom he is walking." The form of his personal worship was singularly free from ritualistic observances. While entering the shrine, he was not obsessed by any awe or wonder, but would act as if he was going to a very near relation ; and while performing worship he would not care to recite memorised texts. His relationship with God was just as free and natural as human relationship. He realised the goodness of God, and so he was always optimistic in his views. For this reason his words would always bring cheer and strength to weary or despondent souls. Intellectual snobs or philosophical pedants were bewildered to see the conviction with which he talked on problems which they had not been able to solve, all their pride and self-conceit notwithstanding.

Towards the end, he suffered from various physical ailments, but his spiritual conviction was never shaken. While he was on his death-bed he said, "When I think of Him, I become forgetful of all physical sufferings." During this time, the Upanishads used to be read out to him. While listening, he would warm up and of his own accord talk of various deep spiritual truths. On one such occasion he said, "The world with all its enjoyments seems like a heap of ashes. The mind feels no attraction at all for all these things."

While death was slowly approaching, he was unperturbed, absolutely free from any anxiety. Rather he was ready and anxious to meet the Beloved. The night before he passed away, he said, "My last prayer is that the blessings of the Lord be always on the Order." The great soul passed away on 2nd December 1932.

First take hold of your mind through discrimination, then make it calm through proper training, so that it runs towards the Lord all the twenty-four hours of the day. Urge the mind on towards the Lord, then you will understand everything.

The All-powerful Mother of the Universe resides in every woman. If one calls on the Lord with sincere earnestness, He reveals Himself in the form of one's chosen deity. Now you pray to Him with utmost devotion and faith, and He will show you the path that leads to Him. He Himself will grant everything—devotion, faith, and all else that one needs. When we see the sun, we see it with the sun's own light. No other light is required for that. Thus also we see the Lord through His grace alone. Tulsidas, the great devotee, says that the Lord Himself fulfils the desire of one who takes refuge in Him, For instance, the fish that has its shelter in water can swim even against the current, while an elephant is washed away by it. One must surrender oneself likewise.

Before the Lord enters the temple of any one of His children's hearts, he fills it with devotion, faith, and love, just as a king sends different pieces of furniture and vessels to a subject's house which he intends to visit. Else, where can the poorer subject get all those things? The Lord grants devotion, faith, and love, just because He will come.

Keep yourself occupied day and night with good thoughts and good talks. Whenever you find a little

leisure in the course of your daily domestic works, never forget to think of Him. Read good books which help such remembrance. If one calls on the Lord, no matter when or under what circumstances, it will never go in vain. For instance, when a cultivator sows his seeds, no matter whether it is placed in the ground straight or upside down, it shoots up all the same.

That the mind has been unsteady all along from your childhood is nothing peculiar with you, this is the case with everyone. But one thing that you have to remember is that, come what may, you have to proceed towards the Lord, who stands behind all sorrow and suffering. This you must know for certain. However you may suffer, and however great the pain may be, never forget the Lord's name. He is our only refuge in weal or woe.

Nothing will ever end in evil by the will of Him who is all good. That people undergo diverse sorrows in life is also a source of experience. This is what I have learnt to be the essential truth. The Master will bring round everybody.

You ask me how you can have peace. Swami Vivekananda used to sing a song (of Kabir), which means, "Where would you seek for me, O devotee? I am not in Kashi, Kailas, or Mecca, or in a Masjid, or anywhere else, but I am just by you yourself. When you have faith even for a moment, you will find me in a trice through the least searching. Hear of this faith by sitting near all the devotees." All this may appear rather too dry and intellectual for you. But know this much for certain that the great Universal Mother lives in and permeates everything—be it happiness or sorrow or anything else. There is another way of attaining peace of mind. When you have no work in hand sit down with

the other neighbour and read some good book and discuss about it. Talk of the Lord and you will find how the mind frees itself from all the trammels of the world. Swami Vivekananda once prayed, "Lord, place me in a position where all others may criticise and abuse me, so that all my heart, mind, and love may turn to you alone."

Why do people lose peace of mind? How can a man have peace who thinks bad thoughts, talks bad things, and keeps his mind occupied with trifling affairs day and night? People generally lack ideals, they are always led by what others say or do. One who is good himself, finds the whole world good, while a thief considers all others to be thieves as well.

You complain of restlessness during japa. That is nothing peculiar in your case, many others are in the same predicament. Still you must never cease from calling on the Lord, and know this for certain that the Lord's name cuts through all obstacles. Howsoever it may be—be it perfectly or imperfectly—keep on repeating His name, which has a power of its own. A sweet cake, for instance, will taste sweet, no matter from which side of it you take a bite.

Man enters family life and gets involved in worldly affairs. But if he takes refuge in the Lord and then attends to the duties of life, he can withstand much better the storms and stresses of the world, all of which he can ignore by his dependence on God's dispensation.

All that we see around will cease to exist some day or other, God's name alone will survive. And anyone who will think of God, and repeat His name, will have everything intact—here and hereafter. His name is true for ever.

Man suffers just because he forgets god. Diverse are the miseries of this world, which, however, is impermanent by its very nature. He who can accept God as his own, does not suffer so intensely from worldly sorrows. Try to think of God as your father or mother. If weep you must, weep before God, and pray, "Lord, grant me faith and devotion, and reveal yourself to me."

One can hear of good things from anybody. As a man can pick up a valuable gem even from a dirty place, similarly can one hear anything about God that appeals to him, it does not matter who the speaker is. "Even a pariah is a saint if he has devotion for God."

Dedicate your life to good work. God blesses all good action. Never mind how He keeps you—be it in happiness or sorrow. If you are to give your whole mind to anybody, it must be to God alone. Go on doing good works without caring whether men praise or blame. Your ideal must be God and good works. Innumerable are the men whose passions are strong. The Master used to say that the mind is like a mad horse, which is prone to running hither and thither, and just as a coachman controls the horse with the girdles, so must a man direct the mind with the power of discrimination, which is already in him. If men are guided by this discrimination, they never come to grief.

SWAMI VIJNANANANDA

Swami Vijnanananda, before he took orders, was known by the name of Hariprasanna Chattopadhyaya. He was born on 28th October 1868, in a respectable family of Belgharia, which is within a couple of miles of Dakshineswar. When reading in the first or second class of a High school, Hariprasanna saw Shri Ramakrishna at Dewan Govinda Mukherji's house. But Hariprasanna was too young then. The real meeting came off two years later. It was in the year 1883 that Hariprasanna, then a student of the St. Xavier's College, went to Dakshineswar with his fellow students Sharat (Swami Saradananda) and Barada Pal. The Master, as was his wont, showed great love and kindness towards Hariprasanna, which bound him indissolubly to him. Young though Hariprasanna was, it did not take him much time to find out that here was a man who was extraordinary in every sense of the word, and he was as much captivated by his words of wisdom as he was drawn by his charming naivety. As the Master soon left for Mani Mallik's house in Calcutta, the three friends followed him there. Naturally, Hariprasanna returned home very late that night. His mother had been waiting anxiously for him, and when she learnt that he had been to that Brahmin of Dakshineswar, who was then considered crazy by a section of people, the good lady said in an angry tone, "So you had been to that mad Brahmin who has deranged the brains of no less than three hundred and fifty young men?" In later days, after recounting the event, he used to comment, "Derangement

of brain indeed! The brain is still deranged." And he would add, "Had I not been caught in the influence of that mad man, who knows where I should have been now—wallowing in the welter of the world?"

He said that he met the Master thus at Dakshineswar for five or six times. One afternoon Hariprasanna went to Dakshineswar, and on request from the Master stayed there for the night. The Master himself took almost nothing at night, but special arrangement was made for the meal of the boy. Then very affectionately, the Master himself hung a mosquito-curtain and spread a mat for young Hariprasanna to sleep on in his own room —a privilege which was reserved for only the chosen few. When Hariprasanna was lying on his bed, the Master came near and began to talk to him. Very tenderly he said, "Do you know why I love you all so much? You are my own people. The Divine Mother has shown me this." The conversation lasted for some time, during the course of which the boy began to feel sleepy. After a while Hariprasanna found the Master going round and round his bed clapping his hands and muttering something indistinct. He began to wonder whether Shri Ramakrishna was really a mad man as some supposed him to be. Afterwards he used to say that on that night the Master gave him all that was to be given to him.

Shri Ramakrishna's love for his young disciples or would-be apostles was immense. If any of them did not go to Dakshineswar for a considerable time, the Master would send for him or inquire about him through a messenger. At one time Hariprasanna did not visit Dakshineswar for a rather long time, and the Master sent word to him through Sharat to come and see him. When Hariprasanna arrived at Dakshineswar and met

the Master, the latter, in an aggrieved tone, asked, "Why is it that you don't care to come here? It is difficult to get you here even after sending a messenger!" The young disciple very frankly said, "I don't always get the mood to come, so I don't." At this the Master simply smiled and said, "You practise a little meditation, I believe?" "I do try to meditate, but how to have good meditation? I don't have any real meditation at all", replied Hariprasanna. The answer astonished the Master, who remained quiet for a while. Hariprasanna was looking at his face eagerly awaiting the words that would drop from his lips. As he was doing this, the face of the Master changed, he looked grave and said, "All right, just go to the Panchavati now and try to meditate." Then he beckoned him to come nearer and wrote something on his tongue with his finger and sent him to the Panchavati: Hariprasanna wended his way towards the Panchavati, but after the Master had touched him, he was in a state of intoxication and could hardly walk. As he sat for meditation at the Panchavati, he became for a long time oblivious of his surroundings and of the outside world. When Hariprasanna returned to his senses, he found the Master seated by his side smiling and gently passing his hands over his body. After a while the Master broke the silence and asked, "What? Did you have meditation today?" "Yes, today I had the experience of a good meditation," said Hariprasanna in astonishment. "Henceforward you will find that you will have good meditation every day", the Master assured him further. Shri Ramakrishna then went to his room accompanied by Hariprasanna, to whom he very affectionately gave many instructions about the intricacies of spiritual life. Swami Vijnanananda would

say afterwards, "I was amazed to see his love for us that day. Repeatedly did this occur to my mind: 'Indeed, how much does he think for us!' I had no idea of this. There can be no comparison with his love." It was on that day that the Master told him, "Beware of the wiles of sex-attraction. Be very very careful on that point. You boys are the chosen people of the Divine Mother. She will get many things done through you. So I say to you, 'Be very very careful.'" Swami Vijnanananda throughout his life obeyed this instruction in letter and in spirit.

How very free and intimate was the Master with his disciples is revealed from the following interesting incident, narrated by Swami Vijnanananda himself: "I wrestled with the Master out there on the verandah (pointing out of the west door of the room of Shri Ramakrishna, overlooking the Ganga). He was such a little man, and I was big and strong, so I put him down easily. His body was so delicate, so soft, just like a baby's." But though victorious in the bout, Hariprasanna felt that some energy had passed into him from the Master through the physical contact, and he felt awed.

One of his class-friends says that as a student Hariprasanna was very spirited and would be upset at the sight of any moral turpitude or social injustice. After passing the First Arts Examination from Calcutta he went to Bankipore, Bihar, where he was when Shri Ramakrishna left his mortal body. He related that he had a vision of the Master at that time. He graduated from the Patna College and then went to study Civil Engineering at Poona.

After taking his degree of L.C.E. he joined the Government service and rose in the course of a few years to

the position of a District Engineer. By that time the monastery at Baranagore had been founded, and the monastic disciples of the Master often became his guests at different places. The flame of renunciation, however, that had been kindled in him by the Master was burning within him, and he found it impossible to remain in the world for a long time. Even as an officer Hariprasanna was taciturn, would mix with few people, and remained in his bungalow absorbed in his own thoughts. But his colleagues and assistants were surprised at his uncommon degree of integrity as well as his strictness in regard to the discharge of his duties. And those who came into close touch with him revered him almost as a god—such was the force of his character, pure, spotless, and at the same time humble and unassuming.

In the year 1896, shortly before Swami Vivekananda returned for the first time from his triumphant mission in the West, Hariprasanna joined the Brotherhood at Alambazar, where the monastery had meanwhile been shifted. Hariprasanna was very devoted to his mother, and it was only for her sake that he had accepted a job and continued in it for some years. But when he had collected enough money to meet her future maintenance, he felt his conscience free. He was then at Etah. Before the final decision for renunciation was taken, he had two repeated visions of the Master who urged him to give up the world. So with his worldly duty over and conviction firm he joined the Ramakrishna Math.

Swami Vijnanananda accompanied Swami Vivekananda on his trip to Rajputana and elsewhere. Just before the monastery was removed to its permanent home at Belur in 1899, the task of constructing the necessary buildings was entrusted to Swami Vijnana-

nanda, who later also supervised the construction of the embankment on the Ganga in front of the main building. Swamiji, who was then living at the Belur Math, one day saw him at work in the hot sun, and, as a favour, but mostly in fun, sent him, through a disciple, the little remnant of a glass of cold drink. Swami Vijnanananda took the glass and, although he noticed the minute quantity of the sherbet sent, he quaffed it just the same. To his wonder, he found that those few drops had completely allayed his thirst! When he next met Swamiji, the latter asked him how he had enjoyed the drink. He replied that though there had been very little left, yet it had the effect of quenching his thirst. Thereupon both laughed. This is but a solitary instance of the pleasant things which took place to sweeten the relationship among the brother-disciples.

Another humorous incident illustrative of their cordiality deserves mention. While the construction work was going on at the Belur Math, some materials were being eagerly expected. One evening Swami Brahmananda said that the materials would arrive by boat before the next morning, which Swami Vijnanananda doubted. Thereupon a wager was laid and both retired for the night. In the early hours of the morning Swami Vijnanananda got up to see whether the boat had come. It had not; so he returned to his bed elated at the prospect of winning the wager. A little later, the other Swami also came out, found the boat moored and quietly retired again. After daybreak Swami Vijnanananda, without suspecting anything, came to him and joyously demanded the wager. "What for?" said the other. Then the disconcerting truth dawned upon Swami Vijnanananda, and finding the tables turned on

him, he said, "Well, I have no money, you pay it for me!" General laughter followed. On another occasion a similar result greeted his prediction about rain. Afterwards the Swami would narrate those incidents by way of tribute to his illustrious brother-monk.

Swamiji, as is well known, was a man of varying moods. Sometimes he was playful, then everybody could approach him with freedom. But at other times he became very grave, when none dared face him with unpleasant facts. One day he was having a talk with Swami Vijnanananda, when the latter, encouraged by his light mood, not only had the boldness to differ from him, but even went so far as to say, "India won't follow your social message!" Swamiji's countenance changed. He became very serious, and after a few moments he called out to Swami Brahmananda, "Look here, Rakhal, he tells me that I won't be followed!" Swami Brahmananda made light of the incident, remarking, "Why do you listen to him? He knows nothing!" Meanwhile Swami Vijnanananda, who had seen his mistake, apologised, and everything was all right.

Swamiji had a great desire to raise a big memorial temple to the Master at the Belur Math and entrusted the task of planning it to Swami Vijnanananda, giving him specific instructions for it. The Swami, in consultation with a noted European architect of Calcutta, prepared a design of the proposed temple, which had the approval of Swami Vivekananda. Swamiji's premature passing away in 1902 nipped the project in the bud. But the serious thoughts of spiritual giants never die out; they only bide their time. Thirty years after Swami Vivekananda's exit from this world, a magnificent offer of help came from some devoted American students

of his teachings, which made it possible for the authorities of the Belur Math to erect the present beautiful temple of Shri Ramakrishna after the design left by Swamiji. The foundation-stone of this noble edifice was set in its proper place in July 1935, by Swami Vijnanananda as Vice-President of the Order. More of this later. For the present we return to earlier events.

Swami Vijnanananda, visiting many places as a wandering monk, came to Allahabad in the year 1900. He became the guest of a doctor friend and wanted to pass a short time in that sacred place of pilgrimage. At that time there was in Allahabad a group of young men who met together in a rented house which they called Brahmavadin Club, and they made attempts to improve themselves morally and spiritually through scriptural study, discussion, and worship. This group of boys was organised by a devotee of Shri Ramakrishna who had gone to Allahabad some years back and who left for Calcutta in the year 1900. Then the boys had to manage their own affairs without any superior guidance. When they heard that a disciple of Shri Ramakrishna had come to the city, they thought it a stroke of good fortune and at once went to the Swami to request him to come to their place and stay there for some time to guide and supply them with help and inspiration. The keen earnestness and sincere devotion of the boys persuaded the Swami to visit their place, and after seeing everything, he felt inclined to put up there for a period. This was the beginning of a great thing. For in this place the Swami passed eight precious years of his life in hard Tapasya, study, and meditation till he afterwards established a permanent centre of the Ramakrishna Math in the city, where he spent the rest of his

life as a unique spiritual force. At the Brahmavadin Club, the Swami had to pass through much hardship—being his own cook and servant, depending for subsistence on what chance might bring. But he hardly felt the suffering, for his mind and thought were centred on a plane where these things could not reach. Most of the time he would spend in meditation and study, seeking no company, but not refusing any help to persons who sought it. Thus through the silent influence of his example as well as through personal contact, he changed the course of many lives. It was only in the evening that outsiders were generally allowed to see him. For them he would sometimes hold scriptural classes or would otherwise solve their problems through informal talks. The Swami was always loth to talk much. Specially with regard to spiritual matters he would dismiss the whole problem with as few words as possible—sometimes in fun and sometimes in a serious mood. But he had a wonderful capacity to satisfy the inquirers even with his short conversation. To persons who would come with any big philosophical problem, he would say, "Just follow the maxims which you have read in the copy books—namely, 'Always speak the truth', 'To take a thing without the consent of its owner is to steal'," and so on. It would be very difficult to draw him out specially on spiritual things, but when he was in a mood to talk, he would at once change the atmosphere and supply spiritual food to the listeners which would give them sustenance for many years to come, if not for their whole lives.

From the Brahmavadin Club the Swami removed himself to the Ramakrishna Math, Muthigunj, which he founded in the year 1910. Here also he lived the

same austere life as in the Club, only his sphere of activity was now wider. In the course of time, a dispensary was opened as a part of the activities of the Ashrama. But these activities touched but the outer fringe of his life which always flowed inwardly beyond the possibility of the knowledge of ordinary people. With reference to him, Swami Brahmananda who had great spiritual insight would say, "It is very difficult to know him. He always keeps himself hidden. But he is a knower of Brahman. He has known the Self and is thus satisfied." He was eager to send those boys who had special spiritual aptitude to Allahabad to grow under the inspiration of Swami Vijnanananda.

Swami Vijnanananda was also a great scholar. He was a voracious reader and had varied intellectual interests. He was a great friend of Srijut Srish Chandra Basu and Major B. D. Basu, two noted scholars of Allahabad at that time. At their instance, he also undertook some literary work. Besides writing two works in Bengali entitled *A Manual of Engineering* and *Waterworks,* he translated from Sanskrit into English the voluminous Purâna, *Devi-Bhâgavata,* two ancient astrological and astronomical works, Varahamihira's *Brihajjâtaka,* and *Surya Siddhânta,* the latter into Bengali as well as English. Towards his last days he was engaged in translating the Râmâyana into English, which work he left unfinished.

Swami Vijnanananda loved retirement. He was, therefore, not actively engaged in the main work of the Ramakrishna Mission. But whenever his help was necessary he would ungrudgingly give it. His engineering knowledge was particularly useful in this respect. He supervised the construction of some buildings of

the Ramakrishna Mission Home of Service, Varanasi, as also of the Swami Vivekananda Temple at the Belur Math. Besides, he helped with valuable advice in regard to the construction of other buildings.

On account of his humility and love of retirement, he refused for years on end to be a trustee of the Ramakrishna Math. But when in 1934 after the passing away of Swami Shivananda, the then President of the Ramakrishna Order, the necessity arose for his becoming a trustee, he could not decline it any longer. He became Vice-President of the Order that very year, and on the demise of Swami Akhandananda, the next President, he became the President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission in March 1937. Feeling in his heart of hearts the urge to initiate people—weary pilgrims in the wilderness of life—he broke, towards the end of his life, his lifelong practice of not initiating anybody, although he was pre-eminently qualified to be a Guru. This sense of duty marked him throughout. Through his grace hundreds of men and women were placed on the path of spiritual progress. During the last few years of his life he travelled extensively and visited many centres of the Ramakrishna Order including Colombo and Rangoon. Everywhere his presence was the occasion of spiritual awakening to innumerable persons.

Although he would not usually talk seriously with those who approached him with big philosophical problems and the like for the sake of mere discussion, when sincere inquirers approached him with the pressing problems of their inner life, his face would light up and with great affection, love, and sympathy he would talk, and the problems, which to the persons concerned appeared knotty, would dissolve immediately, and they

would go away with their heavy burden removed. Living, as he always was, on the spiritual plane, to make supreme efforts for the realisation of Truth was the burden of his advice given to the devotees. "God-vision is the true aim of human life, for that alone can give us real and lasting satisfaction. Man hankers after the things of the world, wealth, sense enjoyments, honour, etc., in the hope that these can give him happiness in life. But it is the experience of all that the pursuit of these has only a reverse effect on the mind. Not only do we fail to realise the desired end through that, but the restlessness of the mind is even increased, and we are rendered more unhappy than in the beginning. Through wealth and honour our egotism is bloated up, and there is no greater obstacle in the spiritual path than egotism. . . . The supreme duty of man is to remember Him always, whether one is engaged in consciously repeating His name or not. Every breath of ours should be associated with Him, in our mind. We should consider that we breathe in God to make the inside pure, and we breathe out God to make the outside pure", he said to a group of devotees who met him in Madras.

"But how can we have peace seeing that there is so much conflict and suffering in the country owing to trade depression and political struggles?" asked one of them. "Why do you make so much of these struggles that are going on in the outside world?" the Swami asked in reply, and he added, "Do you think that they will stop, supposing you gain your immediate end and the present phase of the struggle passes away? Certainly they will not. Restlessness arises not from these external struggles, but from our own internal hankering and our clinging to the things of the world. Even if

God were to appear before us to bring peace unto our souls, we would refuse to recognise Him. For when He comes, He takes away our worldly possessions, and few of us are ready to make this sacrifice."

Sometimes precious little gems were hidden in the words he uttered in fun. For instance, he asked a devotee, "Have you ever seen a ghost?" "No, sir", was the reply. "Why, they are already in your body", said the Swami, "not one, but five altogether." As the devotee could not follow, and looked at him for explanation, he said "The body is made up of five Bhutas (the word meaning both ghosts and the constituent material elements), and as one would call on Rama to get rid of the fear of ghosts, so also one must take refuge in Rama to be saved from the lures of these elements."

Absorbed as he always was in his own thought, there was an atmosphere of aloofness about him. He would always prefer to be left to himself. In later days, when streams of devotees would meet him, he would abruptly say, "I would like to be quiet." In this matter he was no respecter of persons. He could not submit himself to any social code of conduct. To one who did not know him well, his manner, dress, and mode of life might have seemed a bit out of the way. For instance, he dressed in a very peculiar way, with a loose coat hanging down to the knees and having a number of big pockets. His cap, too, would look odd. When walking on the Allahabad streets, someone might be looking at him with wonder, noticing which he would merrily say, "What are you looking at? I am just a monkey (devotee) of Ramji, a monkey of Ramji to be sure."

At times he would be full of wit, humour and mirth and throw the audience into roaring laughter. In

many things he was just like an innocent child. His frankness was beyond comparison. The same trait made him a very plain-speaking person, but his straight words would not give offence to any man.

Though he had a very retiring disposition, he was not insensitive to the misery and suffering around. In Orissa some poor people who took initiation from him brought some presents to the Guru. That upset him immensely, and he declared he would not give initiation if such people brought any offerings. His renunciation was very great and spontaneous. There was a delightful naturalness about it. A rich disciple once gave him a purse as a humble offering. "You have no place to keep that, I suppose? And so you are thrusting the responsibility of keeping the money on me!" said the Swami jocosely but unawares giving out his attitude towards worldly things.

He had many spiritual visions and experiences about which he was discreetly silent. Only now and then in unguarded moments would he give out some secret. Once in the course of conversation he said that he felt the all-pervasive presence of God. At Pegu in Burma he saw an image of Buddha in a pagoda. "It is not like the one I saw", he said in astonishment. "What other image do you mean, Maharaj?" asked the attendant. Then the Swami described how in one of his visits to the sacred spot of Sarnath he had a vision that everything was dissolved in a sea of pure consciousness and out of that appeared a form of Buddha—so sweet and so affectionate! Suddenly the Swami awoke to the consciousness that he was giving out things which he should not. Then he began to make fun about what he had said, in order to neutralise his statements. To him the

evidence of the existence of the Master, though not in the physical body, was as strong and as natural as that of things seen in broad daylight. That faith kept him calm and joyous under all circumstances. In illness he would not take any medicine, nor would he allow attendance on him beyond the least that was necessary. During the last years of his life, he suffered from many ailments. People were hardly aware of them all. Once a rich devotee prayed to him that she might call in the best doctors of Calcutta to examine him. The Swami replied, "I am under the treatment of a doctor better than the best physician you can think of." This precious information was a great relief to her: she thought that some great physician was attending on him. "What is the name of that doctor?" asked the devotee in eager expectation for an answer. "The Lord Himself is my doctor," said the Swami. This simple answer silenced all controversy as to the necessity of calling in a doctor.

From the time when the construction of the Shri Ramakrishna Temple at Belur began, he was anxiously watching its completion in order that he might install his great Master there as early as possible. In view of his failing health, it was decided to have the installation ceremony done just after the completion of the main shrine. On 14th January 1938, Swami Vijnanananda performed the dedication of the temple and the consecration of the marble image of Shri Ramakrishna amidst imposing rites—a function which was witnessed by about fifty thousand devotees and spectators. Having done this, he felt that the great task of his life was finished, and he got ready to join his beloved Master. He paid only one more visit to Belur, and that was only on the occasion of the Master's next birthday. He

looked very much emaciated, and those who saw him then were apprehensive of the approaching end. Still he initiated hundreds of aspirants, lay and monastic, and answered their queries.

The Swami returned to Allahabad, and entered Mahasamadhi on 25th April 1938. The body which he gave up like a rejected garment, but which was the vehicle of supreme spiritual achievement and great spiritual ministration, was consigned with appropriate ceremonies to the sacred waters of the Triveṇi, at the confluence of the Ganga and the Jumna, in the presence of a large number of monks and devotees.

One should not ask for anything from God, but remain satisfied with whatever He is pleased to give. If you ask God for anything, He will give you a gift which is like a double-edged sword. Real welfare lies in using things properly; wrong use of things brings misfortune.

The most remarkable phenomenon is that all men, all animals desire to live for ever. This shows the immortality of all created things. Yes, it is really so. The One that is within us is without beginning and without end, without birth or death. There is nothing like death there.

You are the complete master of your mind, and you can shape it as you like. When the mind is completely under your control, it will have nothing to exist on, except noble thoughts. Just as we know that pure and wholesome food is necessary for our physical existence—impure and contaminated food will only injure the body—so is it necessary to nourish the mind with noble thoughts and high ideals, refusing to provide it with evil thoughts and bad associations, which are like poison to the mind.

You are the master of your mind, and you have to keep it pure. Your responsibility ends there, the rest is God's business. He is Providence, the wish-fulfilling tree, who provides everything. He acts like a valet to provide us with whatever we want. Is He to blame or are we? It is desire that is the root of all evil, and no one else is at fault.

What you require is hope, faith, and patience, and gradually, you will reach the goal. Only a prolonged look at Him will wash away all the sins and sorrows of your heart. He is all-pervading, He is within you all, and He knows everything. Confide in Him, but you must be careful not to go to Him with selfish desires. The mind is full of perversity; and so long as it does not get a severe jolt, it does not properly knock at God's door. It turns to God only when it gets a serious knock.

What the westerners call fate or destiny, we characterise as the result of our actions in previous births. The river of time is flowing on. Will it only do to be drifting with the current? You have got to cross the river, and you can get across only when you swim with the help of that current. Never give way to despair and dejection. Without perseverance nothing great can be achieved. The aim of life is to realize God, and the task is not easy. You must steer clear of laziness and insincerity. Even when you are nearly across, you have to persist in your efforts and go on swimming, or else you will be sucked in by the currents and get drowned. If you put your whole heart into it, God will give you immense, infinite strength, and you will reach dry land. What is true of personal life is also true of a nation. Whatever situation one may be in, one can, to some degree, serve the motherland, serve the common people, and above all serve God. Always have the good of the universe at heart and let this become a part of your daily prayer.

Don't find fault with others. Rather look at your own faults. Once, while I was at Belur, a gentleman came and expressed his regret that we had not married and had renounced the world. By all sorts of arguments, he

demonstrated that our supreme Guru (Shiva) was also married. Owing to ignorance, man tries to support his views with numerous intellectual arguments, and the result is philosophizing. But he gets over all these, once he is blessed with true insight. The Master used to say, "The world is a bad place, and you should renounce it." There was no argument behind it, because he knew that no one can get over his unhappiness without renouncing the world. Once it is realised that a thing is bad, the best thing is to discard it, there is no question of arguing about it.

One reason for the decadence of our country is that, in the name of religion, people put forward harmful theories, as a result of which, people lose their faith in religion itself. Simplicity, faithfulness, and purity of heart are called for. Jesus Christ had no weapons to fight with and suffered crucifixion for the sake of truth. We also have to do likewise, and then only will rise again the sun of India's glory.

The very first attribute of God is lordliness. Contemplation on Him should enable us to gain lordliness over our passions and become masters of our souls. Secondly, whatever God wills is immediately done. We also have the power to translate our wishes into action. Thirdly, God is love. As He loves everyone, so should we love all created beings. One is invoking God's name properly, to the extent that one is able to acquire His attributes.

Selfishness has got the whole nation in its grip. But, again, without the pursuit of self-interest, the world would be at a standstill. Self-interest, however, should not be conceived in narrow and limited terms. Living for the little self is but death. But he who sacrifices his

life for the good of the many is living truly.

You have read in the Gita that God incarnates Himself when virtue declines and vice prevails. The significance of this verse is that, whenever our universal outlook becomes narrow and the mind becomes cramped in this narrowness, sacred and liberal ideas—ideas connected with the infinite—appear once again. Your goodwill should flow out for the whole world. One has to have the spirit of renunciation, excluding petty selfishness. You should broaden your outlook and see the Universal Father in all created things.

One who can detach his mind from material things will see the light of God and His presence in everything. Worldly attachment draws people away from God and scorch them in the wild fire of the world.

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Jacket Engraved & Printed by
Reproduction Syndicate, Calcutta 6



The wavy waters in the picture are symbolic of Karma; and lotus, of Bhakti; and the rising-sun, of Jnana. The encircling serpent is indicative of Yoga and the awakened Kundalini Shakti, while the swan in the picture stands for the Paramatman (Supreme Self). Therefore the idea of the picture is that by the union of Karma, Jnana, Bhakti, and Yoga, the vision of the Paramatman is obtained.

—SWAMI VIVEKANANDA